Information Paper for Legislative Council Panel on Manpower and Panel on Home Affairs

Report of the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the work and recommendations of the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth (Task Force) in relation to measures for addressing issues relating to non-engaged youth (NEY).

Background

2. The Task Force, appointed by the Chief Executive, was established in March 2004 to administer the $50 million Youth Sustainable Development and Engagement Fund (the Fund) approved by the Finance Committee. The term of the Task Force expired on 29 February 2008. The Task Force submitted a report to the Government on its work and recommendations on the measures for addressing issues relating to NEY. The full report is at **Annex**.

Work of the Task Force

3. The Task Force strategically focused its work on three major areas, viz. (a) pilot projects on employment-related training programmes for NEY, (b) research studies on NEY-related topics, and (c) train-the-trainer programmes and activities for youth workers.

4. With a view to facilitating its examination of NEY-related issues, the Task Force commissioned two research studies on NEY in Hong Kong, namely "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for NEY in Hong Kong" and "Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of NEY in Hong Kong".

5. The major areas of work accomplished by the Task Force during its tenure are summarised as follows -

(a) Examined the current position of NEY problem and the latest profile of NEY in Hong Kong (*Chapter 2 of the report refers*);

(b) Reviewed, at the macro-level, six existing education, training and employment programmes available for NEY (*Chapter 3 of the report refers*);

(c) Processed and approved applications of pilot projects for funding support by the Fund, monitored the progress and implementation of the approved projects, and conducted evaluation on their effectiveness and sustainability (*Chapter 4 of the report refers*);

(d) Organised training programmes and activities for youth workers and parents of NEY (*Chapter 5 of the report refers*); and

(e) Studied the prevalence of learning and psychological difficulties among NEY (*Chapter 6 of the report refers*).

Recommendations of the Task Force

6. The Task Force made a series of recommendations on the directions and measures for addressing issues relating to NEY (*Chapter 7 of the report refers*).

7. In brief, the main recommendations of the Task Force as set out in the report are: -

(a) **Making use of a suitable established mechanism for policy formulation and central coordination**: The Task Force recommended that a comprehensive and holistic approach should be adopted to tackle the NEY-related issues and that the NEY-related policy and measures be taken forward under a suitable established mechanism comprising relevant government bueraux/departments and other stakeholders.

(b) **Strengthening the role of schools and family as an effective preventive measure**: The Task Force recognised early identification, prevention and intervention as the most effective, sustainable and cost-effective strategy in tackling the NEY problem. It

recommended that the Education Bureau and Social Welfare Department (SWD) should step up efforts to enhance the involvement and participation of schools and family and strengthen the support services for them.

(c) **Capitalising on existing support services for youth through better coordination:** The Task Force recommended that better coordination and closer collaboration among the relevant stakeholders should be encouraged to facilitate timely referral services that connect NEY with the appropriate support services and training programmes that meet their needs.

(d) **Exploring special assistance for NEY with low motivation and weak social network**: Noting that the service targets of the Family Support Programme[1] launched by the SWD also included NEY (in particular the hidden youth), the Task Force recommended that the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk under the SWD should take into account the characteristics and needs of NEY, and promote cross-sector collaboration and coordination in achieving effective service delivery.

(e) **Strengthening professional training**: The Task Force was of the view that consideration might be given to further enhancing the professional training and support for youth workers, particularly on areas such as career planning and guidance for youth, and support services for youth with learning difficulties and psychological problems. It recommended that the Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning under the SWD should look into and follow up on the related issues.

(f) **Tapping community and corporate resources in support of innovative services:** The Task Force recommended that training providers and non-governmental organisations should be encouraged

[1] The Family Support Programme is an enhanced service launched by the SWD since early 2007 to serve a more difficult-to-reach group of vulnerable and socially isolated individuals and families through provision of intensive support and proactive outreaching services, with a view to motivating them to receive appropriate services at an early stage so as to prevent further deterioration of their problems.

to build closer partnerships and collaborate with the private sector and other non-governmental funding bodies with a view to soliciting more community support and participation in sustaining services for NEY.

(g) **Exploring the feasibility of setting up a centralised database on NEY**: Given the sensitivity and complications involved in setting up the database, the Task Force recommended that further and more detailed study of the matter be conducted in future, if considered necessary and appropriate.

(h) **Developing a screening tool for identification of NEY with learning difficulties in the long run**: The Task Force was of the view that consideration might be given to sharing the initial screening tool developed in one of the research studies with relevant stakeholders for reference and comments upon request, but the tool should only be taken as an experimental tool and must be used with caution.

Way Forward

8. The Government has accepted in principle the report of the Task Force and its recommendations. The Labour and Welfare Bureau together with other relevant bureaux and departments will follow up on the recommendations set out above.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
July 2008

Annex

Report of the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth

July 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I Introduction

1 At the request of the Chief Executive (CE), the Commission on Youth (CoY) prepared and submitted to him a report entitled "Continuing Development and Employment Opportunities for Youth" in 2003. One of the recommendations in the report is to set up a fund for new initiatives and pilot projects for non-engaged youth (NEY).

2 The Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth (the Task Force), appointed by the CE, was formally established in March 2004 under the co-chairmanship of Dr Philemon CHOI and former Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower (Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare after the re-organisation of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007) to administer the $50 million Youth Sustainable Development and Engagement Fund (the Fund).

3 The Task Force has strategically focused its work on three major areas, viz.(a) pilot projects on employment-relating training programmes for NEY, (b) research studies on NEY-related topics; and (c) train-the-trainer programmes and activities for youth workers.

4. With a view to facilitating its examination of NEY-related issues, the Task Force has commissioned independent researchers to conduct the following two research studies on NEY in Hong Kong -

(a) "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong"; and

(b) "Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong".

5. Taking into account its practical experience in steering and monitoring the implementation of pilot projects, the recommendations of the two studies on NEY and their practicality, feasibility as well as other relevant considerations, the Task Force has made a series of recommendations on the policy directions and measures for addressing issues relating to NEY.

II Understanding NEY

6. The Task Force notes that non-engagement and non-participation of youth in education, employment and training is not a phenomenon unique to Hong Kong. Indeed, it has fast become a social issue that has attracted extensive attention in the developed countries, including the United Kingdom (UK) and Japan, in recent years.

7. In the UK, the percentage of young people not in education, employment and training ("NEET") has persisted at around 10 per cent nationally in the 16 to 18-year-old category since 2001. The causes of youth non-engagement in the UK are largely associated with educational disaffection and deprived background of the disadvantaged young people, which hindered their participation in education and employment. Nevertheless, some studies and statistical reports also illustrated that a significant proportion of the NEET group in the UK come from more/relatively advantaged backgrounds, and numerous young people experience one or several spells of non-participation after leaving school at the age of 16, hoping to take time out before progressing onto further education opportunities or adjusting their options. In other words, non-participation of youth in the UK does not arise only from inability or unwillingness to enter learning or working stage.

8. In Japan, NEET refers to people aged between 15 and 34, who are out of the labour force, neither in education nor in housework, and unmarried. Apart from the criteria of age and marital status, another remarkable difference between those who are NEET in Japan and those in the rest of the world is that unemployed persons (i.e. those with motivation to seek work) would not be classified as NEET in Japan. Despite the fact that the prolonged recessions since the mid-1990s has led to a drastic decline in the number of regular job openings offered to young people, the phenomenon of NEY in Japan is not necessarily the "consequence" of poverty and shrinkage of labour market. On the contrary, it is generally believed that the NEET group in Japan mainly comprises spoiled children from relatively wealthy but rather over-protective families who face little pressure to become independent and are even allowed to withdraw from the society or any form of engagement. NEET in Japan are thus more regarded as being reluctant rather than unable to find a job.

9. The Task Force believes that the phenomenon of NEY in Hong Kong is a combination of the British model and the Japanese model. While recession would definitely increase the number of non-engaged young people, an economic upturn may not necessarily result in a drastic reduction of the NEY population. Tackling the

NEY-related issues is thus a complicated task due to the highly diverse nature of the circumstances shaping NEY in Hong Kong.

10. The Task Force is pleased to note that the number of NEY in Hong Kong has decreased from 73 400 in the second quarter of 2002 to 49 000 in the first quarter of 2007. It is believed that the efforts made by the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to help NEY find employment or resume schooling, as well as the improving economic and labour market conditions in recent years have all contributed to the reduction in the size of NEY population in Hong Kong.

11. In order to obtain the latest information on NEY in Hong Kong, the Task Force has commissioned independent researchers to conduct a household survey in mid-2007. The survey is covered in the "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for non-engaged youth in Hong Kong". According to the survey, a sizable proportion of the non-engaged respondents were without a job and not seeking one, partly because they believed no job was available and partly because they did not want to work. Also noteworthy is that about 85% of the non-engaged respondents had not sought assistance from the employment services or participated in the training programmes funded by the Government. Besides, the indexes of self-esteem, parent-child relationship and availability of help/support were relatively lower for non-engaged respondents than for other groups of respondents.

III Review of Existing Training and Employment Programmes for Youth

12. With a view to examining the effectiveness of the existing education, training and employment programmes in addressing the needs of NEY in Hong Kong, the Task Force has reviewed, at the macro level, the following six programmes available for youth, including NEY in Hong Kong -

(a) Basic Craft Certificate Courses organized by the Vocational Training Council;
(b) Project Yi-jin co-ordinated by the Education Bureau (EDB);
(c) Youth Pre-employment Training Programme launched by the Labour Department (LD);
(d) Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme launched by the LD;
(e) "FARM" project organized by the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong; and
(f) Youth Employment Start-up Programme operated by the Youth Outreach.

13. The Task Force notes that the six programmes are generally effective in helping young

people, in particular NEY, in the following ways:

(a) Acquiring formal qualifications;
(b) Strengthening school-to-work linkage;
(c) Gaining a foothold in the labour market; and
(d) Fostering a greater connection with the society.

14. Noting that each of the six programmes focuses on certain particular dimensions of youth engagement, the Task Force acknowledges that it would be very difficult to design and implement a one-size-fits all programme for young people with different backgrounds and capacities. Yet, it has identified some key factors which are crucial for the success of education, training and employment programmes for youth. They are –

(a) Offering appropriate information and guidance;
(b) Having caring, knowledgeable and skillful workers/advisors; and
(c) Fostering collaboration among stakeholders.

IV Pilot projects on Employment-related Training for NEY

15. With the support of the Fund, a total of 22 pilot projects falling within the following five categories have been launched and completed -

(a) Programmes that aim at motivating NEY to seek self-improvement and work;
(b) Modern apprenticeship schemes;
(c) Training for sports-related careers;
(d) Training for creative and cultural industries; and
(e) Training and employment programmes in the Mainland.

16. An evaluation on the effectiveness and sustainability of the pilot projects has been conducted and is covered in the "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong". The pilot projects have in general raised the self-esteem of participants and helped NEY become more meaningfully engaged. Moreover, most participants have shown continued enhancement in their self-esteem, as confirmed by follow-up interviews conducted at least three months and six months after completion of training. The pilot projects also have a sustained impact on the engagement of the participants. The proportion of NEY participants has dropped from 68% of all participants before training to 19.5% three months after completion of

training, and further decreased to 14.8% six months after completion of training.

17. Among the 22 pilot projects[1] supported by the Fund, the organizers of nine projects have secured funding for running similar programmes after expiry of support from the Fund. The funding sources include internal resources of the organizations concerned; other government funding; sponsorship from non-governmental funding bodies; service charges; or a mix of various funding sources. The organizers of another nine projects have not offered similar programmes, either because they were still seeking resources or they had no plans to run similar services.

18. The Task Force notes that while there are difficulties and limitations in organizing and implementing projects for NEY, the more successful pilot projects are those the organizers of which have the ability and network to -

    (a) reach out to the NEY (especially those who are less motivated to seek training);

    (b) arrange vocational and skills training that matches both the ability and interests of the participants and the needs of employers;

    (c) provide counseling and training in interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the participants; and

    (d) solicit support from employers to provide on-the-job training and subsequent employment opportunities.

V Training Programmes and Activities for Youth Workers and Parents

19. The Task Force recognizes that youth workers play a key role in the delivery of support services for NEY. While many youth workers possess rich frontline social work experience, the Task Force is of the view that further training could be provided to enhance their understanding of the characteristics of NEY and skills in rekindling their motivation to study or work.

20. The Task Force commissioned the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to provide a

[1] For the purpose of counting the total number of projects supported by the Fund, if a project was carried out in two phases but its organizer had submitted separate applications for funding support for each phase, the two phases were counted as two separate projects. A total of eight such projects (i.e. four projects, with each implemented in two phases) were involved. Since four projects out of the 22 projects were phase-one projects, the sustainability study only covered 18 projects.

train-the-trainer programme for frontline workers, and develop a set of Teaching Kit and Resource Kit for youth service providers and secondary schools to facilitate training on career planning services for young people. A total of 33 training courses and six information seminars were organized.

21. The Task Force also sees the need for teachers and parents to understand the causes of and the problems faced by NEY, and the roles they have in preventing young people from becoming non-engaged. To this end, the Task Force has sponsored one seminar-cum-sharing session for secondary school teachers and 21 seminars for parents to promote their awareness of NEY-related issues.

22. With a view to tapping community resources and encouraging community participation in facilitating youth engagement, the Task Force sponsored a mentorship programme engaging retired persons as mentors to share their experience and provide guidance for NEY.

VI Learning Difficulties and Psychological Problems of NEY

23. The Task Force notes that among the NEY in Hong Kong, some have demonstrated signs of learning difficulties and psychological problems of different degrees. Although there is no research evidence yet to support the causal relationship between "the prevalence of learning difficulties and psychological problems" and "being non-engaged", their correlation may suggest that young people with these problems are more susceptible to being non-engaged. Given so, the Task Force commissioned a study entitled "Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong" to assess the prevalence of learning difficulties and psychological problems among NEY in Hong Kong and examine specifically the needs of NEY with these problems.

24. The research team has attempted to develop an initial and experimental screening tool for identification of NEY who may have learning difficulties and psychological problems (S-NEY). The S-NEY consists of three parallel forms/questionnaires for collecting information from NEY subjects (SNEY-form A), frontline workers dealing with them (SNEY-form B), and their family members (SNEY-form C). To facilitate the identification of subjects who may have learning difficulties and psychological problems, a newly developed instrument named as Learning Difficulties Screening (LDS) and an adaptation of General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) were included in the S-NEY Form A for NEY subjects.

25. Among the 307 NEY subjects sampled, it was projected that around 26% of them could be regarded as having potential or certain degree of learning difficulties, and 13.7% were having psychological problems by the time the study was conducted. 3.9% were identified as having potential learning difficulties and psychological problems.

26. The Task Force is aware that the findings on the NEY subjects with potential learning difficulties and/or psychological problems are subject to a number of limitations and should be interpreted with caution. The Task Force also notes that the experimental screening tool developed by the research team (S-NEY) is still in the developing stage and it is by no means a diagnostic tool for assessment of subjects with specific learning difficulties and/or psychological problems. The tool will need to undergo further and vigorous fine-tuning and validations before it could be adopted for use.

27. To facilitate the identification of service gaps in the existing identification and intervention mechanisms in addressing the needs of NEY, in particular those with learning difficulties and psychological problems, as well as the needs of parents and frontline workers, the research team organized ten focus group discussion sessions to collect views and feedback from the NEY, their parents and frontline workers. The service gaps as identified include -

    (a) Awareness and understanding of learning difficulties and its impact on learning;
    (b) Psychological well-being of NEY;
    (c) Professional training for frontline workers; and
    (d) Availability of resources and support for the family of NEY.

VII Way Forward

28. In drawing up the recommendations on how best to assist NEY in the long run, the Task Force considers it essential to strike a balance between achieving the greatest impact while ensuring the feasibility and sustainability of individual recommendations. Given so, the Task Force recommends that future policy direction and measures for addressing issues relating to NEY should be formulated along the following general premises -

    (a) Adopting an integrated and holistic approach in both policy formulation and delivery of support services;

(b) Striving for consolidation and enhancement of existing services; and

(c) Making the best use of the established mechanisms and networks.

29. Specific recommendations of the Task Force are summarized as follows –

(a) **Making use of a suitable established mechanism for policy formulation and central coordination**. The Task Force recommends that a comprehensive and holistic approach should be adopted to tackle the NEY-related issues at the macro and policy level, with due regard to relevant considerations spanning different policy areas. In particular, the Task Force considers that it would be more appropriate and effective to take forward NEY-related policy and measures under a suitable established mechanism which comprises relevant government bueraux/departments and other stakeholders.

(b) **Strengthening the role of schools and family as an effective preventive measure**. The Task Force recognizes early identification, prevention and intervention as the most effective, sustainable and cost-effective strategy in tackling the NEY problem and considers that schools and family are the two social institutions through which preventive measures could be best administered. It recommends that the EDB should keep in view the need for changes in the education system and school curriculum, ensure the provision of regular and continuous support for schools and teachers, and continue to review and strengthen the screening, assessment and support services for students with learning difficulties. It also recommends that the EDB, Social Welfare Department (SWD) and NGOs providing family and youth services should continue to promote parental education and strengthen the support services for them.

(c) **Capitalizing on existing support services for youth through better coordination.** The Task Force is pleased to note that apart from the various vocational training programmes currently available for youth, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is planning to organise more dedicated training courses to meet the needs and interests of youth following the relaxation of eligibility criteria of the Employees Retraining Scheme, and to implement, on a pilot basis, a Youth Training Programme for NEY aged 15-20. Instead of setting up dedicated services centres for NEY which will likely result in duplication of

services and possible labeling effect on NEY, the Task Force sees the need for encouraging better coordination and closer collaboration among the relevant stakeholders so as to facilitate timely referral services that connect NEY with the appropriate support services and training programmes that meet their needs.

(d) **Exploring special assistance for NEY with low motivation and weak social network.** Noting that the Family Support Programme launched by the SWD aims to provide assistance for a more difficult-to-reach group (including NEY, in particular the hidden youth) through intensive support services and proactive outreaching service, the Task Force recommends that the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk under the SWD should take into account the characteristics and needs of NEY, echo the related policy and measures, and promote cross-sector collaboration and coordination in achieving effective service delivery.

(e) **Strengthening professional training.** The Task Force is of the view that consideration may be given to further enhance the professional training and support for youth workers, particularly on areas such as career planning and guidance for youth, and support services for youth with learning difficulties and psychological problems. It recommends that the Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning under the SWD should look into and follow up on the related issues.

(f) **Tapping community and corporate resources in support of innovative services.** The Task Force notes that while the Government is willing to provide seed money through various established funding schemes, as appropriate, to support the initiation of worthy projects for NEY and to distill from them the successful formula, training providers and NGOs should be encouraged to build closer partnerships and collaborate with the private sector and other non-governmental funding bodies with a view to soliciting more community support and participation in sustaining their services for NEY.

(g) **Exploring the feasibility of setting up a centralized database on NEY.** The Task Force appreciates the value of setting up a centralized database to facilitate the tracking of NEY and their development. Nevertheless, the Task Force is also gravely concerned about the sensitivity and complications involved and thus considers that it is pre-mature to pursue the idea at the current stage. It recommends that further and more detailed study of the matter be conducted in future, if considered necessary and appropriate.

(h) **Developing a screening tool for identification of NEY with learning difficulties in the long run.** The Task Force believes that there are merits in developing and introducing a valid and reliable screening tool for school dropouts and NEY who may not have received screening and/or assessment services in school for various reasons. As for the initial screening tool developed in one of the research studies, the Task Force agrees that while consideration may be given to sharing the tool with relevant stakeholders (including the EDB which is in the course of developing a screening checklist for secondary school students) for reference and comments upon request, the tool should only be taken as an experimental tool and must be used with caution.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

1.1 At the request of the Chief Executive (CE), the Commission on Youth (CoY) prepared and submitted to him a report entitled "Continuing Development and Employment Opportunities for Youth" in 2003. One of the recommendations in the report is to set up a fund for new initiatives and pilot projects for non-engaged youth (NEY).

1.2 To follow up on the recommendation, the Government set up a $50 million "Youth Sustainable Development and Engagement Fund" (the Fund) in 2004 with a view to fostering the promotion of opportunities for training, placement and employment of NEY.

1.3 The Fund was administered by the "Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth" (the Task Force) appointed by the CE.

Terms of Reference and Membership of the Task Force

1.4 The Task Force was formally established in March 2004 for a term of two years, from 1 March 2004 to 28 February 2006. The term was further extended for another two years to 29 February 2008.

1.5 The terms of reference of the Task Force are as follows –

(a) To monitor, co-ordinate and evaluate the implementation of various personal development and employment-related training programmes provided by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for NEY;

(b) To identify the sectors with employment opportunities and develop suitable training and workplace training programmes to address the needs of NEY;

(c) To administer the Fund to finance pilot projects on employment-related training programmes for NEY; and

(d) To commission studies on the problems and needs of NEY and other relevant topics.

1.6 Co-chaired by Dr Philemon CHOI and the Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower before the re-organisation of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007), the Task Force comprises representatives from relevant government bureaux/departments, social services sector, business sector, sports sector, training and education sector, as well as independent persons and young persons. The Labour and Welfare Bureau (Education and Manpower Bureau before 1 July 2007) is responsible for providing secretariat support to the Task Force. The membership of the Task Force is at Annex A.

Work of the Task Force

1.7 The Task Force has strategically focused its work on three major areas, viz. (a) pilot projects on employment-related training programmes for NEY, (b) research studies on NEY-related topics, and (c) train-the-trainer programmes and activities for youth workers. Four sub-committees were set up to advise on the relevant areas of work and make recommendations to the Task Force. Their membership lists are at Annex B.

1.8 With a view to facilitating its examination of NEY-related issues, the Task Force has commissioned the following two research studies on NEY in Hong Kong –

(a) "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong"; and

(b) "Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong".

1.9 Major areas of work accomplished by the Task Force during its tenure are summarized as follows -

(a) Examined the current position of NEY problem and the latest profile of NEY in Hong Kong (*Chapter 2*);

(b) Reviewed, at the macro-level, six existing education, training and employment programmes available for NEY (*Chapter 3*);

(c) Processed and approved applications of pilot projects for funding support by the Fund, monitored the progress and implementation of the approved projects, and conducted evaluation on their effectiveness and sustainability (*Chapter 4*);

(d) Organised training programmes and activities for youth workers and parents of NEY, and developed resource kits and teaching kits for youth workers and secondary schools to facilitate training on career planning services for young people (*Chapter 5*); and

(e) Studied the prevalence of learning and psychological difficulties among NEY (*Chapter 6*).

1.10 Taking into account its practical experience in steering and monitoring the implementation of the pilot projects, the recommendations of the two studies on NEY and their practicality, feasibility as well as other relevant considerations, the Task Force has made a series of recommendations on the policy direction and measures for addressing issues relating to NEY (*Chapter 7*).

2. UNDERSTANDING NEY

The Emergence of NEY as a Social Phenomenon

2.1 To address the issues relating to NEY effectively, the Task Force considers it essential to have a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of NEY and the causes leading to its emergence in Hong Kong. In so doing, the Task Force notes that non-engagement and non-participation of youth in education, employment and training is not a phenomenon unique to Hong Kong. Indeed, this has fast become a social issue that has attracted extensive attention in the developed countries in recent years. As such, in reviewing and studying the causes of the phenomenon in Hong Kong, the Task Force has also drawn reference from the experience of the United Kingdom (UK) and Japan.

"NEET"

2.2 With a view to identifying the causes of non-participation of young people aged between 16 and 18 in the UK in education, work or training, the Social Exclusion Unit in the UK published a report entitled "Bridging the Gap – New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment or Training" in 1999. The report provides useful reference on the underlying causes of the phenomenon of youth non-engagement in the UK. Yet, the term "not in education, employment or training" (NEET), which is applied to describe the non-engaged status of youth, was initially adopted in a study commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment of the UK Government, entitled "Youth Cohort Study: Education, Training and Employment of 16-18 Year Olds in England and the Factors Associated with Non-participation" (DfEE, 2000).

2.3 The Youth Cohort Study (YCS) in the UK is a series of longitudinal surveys that contacts a sample of an academic year-group or "cohort" of young people following their completion of compulsory education, usually at the age of 16, and then usually annually until they are aged 19 or 20. The survey looks into young people's education and labour market experience, their training and qualifications, and a wide range of other issues including socio-economic variables. The specific study mentioned above (*2.2 refers*) examines the participation and non-participation in education, training and employment of young people aged between 16 and 18 in England by drawing on the findings from the YCS for England for each of the ages surveyed in 1998 and 1999.

2.4 Against the above background, NEET in the UK refers to young people aged between 16 and 18 who are not engaged in education, employment and training. The percentage of non-engaged young people has persisted at around 10 per cent nationally in the 16 to 18-year-old category since 2001. According to the latest National Statistics First Release issued by the Department for Education and Skills[1] (2007), there were some 206 000 people who were NEET in the UK at the end of 2006. It was 10.3 per cent of the age bracket, comprising unemployed and economically inactive persons.

2.5 Henceforth, "NEET" becomes the agreeable term in articulating the phenomenon of youth non-engagement across countries. Nevertheless, the age group being referred to and classified under NEET would be adjusted according to local and regional variations, and the computation of the NEET population would vary among countries or cities as well.

2.6 In Japan, for instance, NEET refers to people aged between 15 and 34, who are out of the labour force, neither in education nor in housework, and unmarried. The criteria of age and marital status mark the major differences between those who are NEET in Japan and those in the rest of the world. Also noteworthy is the remarkable difference that unemployed persons (i.e. those with motivation to seek work) would not be classified as NEET in Japan.

Causes of non-engagement

2.7 The terms "NEET" and "NEY" are commonly used in capturing the uncertain conditions of the activity status of young people as compared with the traditional dichotomy between employment and unemployment. The terms, however, also represent a broad and heterogeneous group with differing needs. A major determinant throughout is a low level of aspiration and little motivation (Popham, 2003).

2.8 In order to have a better understanding of this diverse group, many overseas studies have been conducted to look into the causes of their non-engagement. The causes are multi-faceted and may vary across countries.

[1] The "Department for Education and Employment" before the Cabinet reshuffle in 2001.

Experience of the UK

2.9 In the UK, the causes of youth non-engagement are largely associated with educational disaffection and deprived background of the disadvantaged young people, which have hindered their participation in education and employment.

2.10 Identified by the report "Bridging the Gap: New Opportunities for 16-18 Year Olds Not in Education, Employment and Training" (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999), the risk of non-participation is higher for young people if they are raised by poor or unemployed parents, or come from ethnic minorities (particularly Bangladeshis and Pakistanis). Young people who are teenage parents/ homeless/ care leavers[2]/ young offenders; have learning difficulties/disabilities/emotional or behavioral problems/mental illness; and those misusing drugs or alcohol are regarded as in circumstances which create barriers to participation in education, training and employment.

2.11 According to the "Youth Cohort Study: Education, Training and Employment of 16-18 Year Olds in England and the Factors Associated with Non-participation" (DfEE, 2000), there are a number of social, economic and personal factors associated with non-participation of young people, including their living arrangements, parental backgrounds, qualifications and school attendance. Data showed that living in council-rented housing (similar to public housing estates in Hong Kong), having parents in manual occupations or having neither parent in full-time work, all increase the likelihood of a young person becoming non-engaged. Persistent truancy, exclusion from school, lack of qualifications, living with a partner or their own children, and having disabilities or health problems are factors usually associated with the NEET group.

2.12 Nevertheless, these studies and statistical reports also illustrated that a significant proportion of the NEET group come from more/relatively advantaged backgrounds. On the other hand, numerous young people experience one or several spells of non-participation in the next few years after leaving school at the age of 16. They might take time out before progressing onto further education opportunities or adjusting their options, and might probably choose to take a "gap year" in the

[2] In the UK, "children in care" generally refers to children being looked after by a local authority, including those subject to care orders under the Children Act 1989 and those being looked after on a voluntary basis through an agreement with their parents. "Care leavers" refer to those who have left the care of social services.

meantime[3]. Non-participation therefore does not arise only from inability or unwillingness to enter learning or working stage.

Experience of Japan

2.13 In Japan, the emergence of NEY is undeniably related to the prolonged recession since the mid-1990s, which consequently led to a drastic decline in the number of regular job openings offered to young people. Yet, the phenomenon of NEY in Japan is not necessarily the "consequence" of poverty and shrinkage of labour market. On the contrary, it is generally believed that the NEET group in Japan mainly comprises spoiled children from relatively wealthy but rather over-protective families (Nakamura, 2004). Sheltered by a core family with good financial conditions, these young people face little pressure to become independent and are even allowed to withdraw from the society or any form of engagement.

2.14 An online survey on the NEET issue in Japan was conducted by Nomura Research Institute (NRI) in October 2004 with 1 000 respondents. The survey aimed to assess the level of recognition of the term "NEET" among people in Japan, the influence of NEET on the society, the causes of increase in the size of NEET population and measures that should be taken to tackle the issue. Although only 16.9% of the respondents had heard of the term "NEET", the majority of the respondents believed that the NEET population would increase in Japan and that the increase would significantly influence the society. "Economic circumstances such as recession" and "home" were most commonly cited as the cause of the increase in NEET population. The survey results also indicated that, when facing an increase in NEET population, many people considered it important to address the issue at home first, while at the same time recognizing the necessity of efforts made by the public sector. NRI concluded that "increase in NEET is a significant social issue in Japan, and instead of viewing it from the perspectives of labour and educational problems, it is vital to identify it as a structural problem in regard to public safety, economic policies and improvement of the social security system, and work on it accordingly."

[3] According to the study "What Works in Preventing and Re-engaging Young People NEET in London - Research on young people not in education, employment and training (NEET)" commissioned by the Greater London Authority and published in 2007, young people who have often chosen to take time out before progressing onto further or higher education opportunities and are likely to return to education, training and employment are classified as "transition/gap year NEET", which is one of the three sub-categories of NEET.

2.15 Given the above, NEET in Japan are more regarded as being reluctant rather than unable to find a job. Various studies so far suggested that they could be classified into four categories - those who seek momentary pleasure; those who withdraw from the society; those who do nothing, daunted by the difficulties; and those who have lost confidence in their vocational abilities (Hori, 2005).

NEY in Hong Kong

2.16 The phenomenon of NEY in Hong Kong has aroused public attention in recent years. On 1 July 2002, in his speech at the swearing-in ceremony, the former CE made the following remarks:

"Among those who are over 15 years old, about 50% only have education attainment equivalent to Form 3 or below. If we include immigrants and foreign domestic helpers, the mismatch of human resources in Hong Kong is serious. There is an urgent need for development of a comprehensive population policy, and we will work on this within this year. This population policy will be designed to fit Hong Kong's long-term social and economic development, will complement family requirements, and will address the interests of different sectors in our community. We also need to focus on some 90 000 young people among us who are unemployed and unable to pursue further studies. I have asked the Youth Commission to come up with a clear and practical plan within six months to provide our young people with pluralistic options both in terms of training and employment opportunities."

2.17 In 2003, the CoY issued a report entitled "Continuing Development and Employment Opportunities for Youth", which was the first local research looking into the needs of and opportunities for NEY in Hong Kong.

2.18 To better understand the up-to-date position of the NEY problem in Hong Kong, the Task Force commissioned a study entitled "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong" in 2004 to examine, among others, the trend and latest profile of NEY in Hong Kong. The study was conducted from 2004 to 2007 by a research team led by Professor Howard CHENG Chi-ho, Associate Head of Department of Applied Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Mr YIP Hak-kwong, Director of Policy 21 Limited, University of Hong Kong.

Definition of NEY

2.19 The research team has adopted the same definition of NEY as that in CoY's report, i.e. "young people who were unemployed and unable to pursue further studies", and include the following two categories of young people aged between 15 and 24:

(a) Unemployed young persons in the economically active population (including those who do not seek work because they believe work is not readily available); and

(b) Young persons in the economically inactive population who are not studying (excluding those who are full-time home-makers or who cannot work due to chronic illness).

Changes in Labour Market and Its Impacts on Youth

2.20 Young people who fail to continue their education for various reasons will have to enter the job market. Among them, many are aged between 15 and 19. Since they have received less education and possess no/insufficient work experience or job-specific skills, they are usually in a disadvantaged position in their job-seeking, in particular when Hong Kong is undergoing economic structuring and moving towards a knowledge-based economy. The above may help account for the relatively high unemployment rate among young people when comparing to other age groups.

2.21 Rapid growth of the working population, insufficient entry-level work types and vacancies, and keen competition among job-seekers make it difficult for young people to find a job.

2.22 Nevertheless, the emergence of NEY in Hong Kong is not merely the result of changes in labour market. One may note from the demographics of NEY in Hong Kong (please see *2.28* below) that a sizeable proportion of NEY are not seeking work, partly because they believe no job is available and partly because they do not want to work.

2.23 In other words, the Task Force believes that the phenomenon of NEY in Hong Kong is a combination of the British model and the Japanese model mentioned in *2.9* - *2.15*. While recession would definitely increase the number of non-engaged young

people, an economic upturn may not necessarily result in a drastic reduction of the NEY population. Tackling the NEY-related issues is thus a complicated task due to the highly diverse nature of the circumstances shaping NEY in Hong Kong.

Demographics of NEY in Hong Kong in the Early 21st century

2.24 According to a publication of the CoY entitled "Youth in Hong Kong: a Statistical Profile 2002", there were about 106 227 NEY in 2001, representing about 11.5% of the total youth population[4] in Hong Kong.

2.25 The report "Continuing Development and Employment Opportunities for Youth" published by the CoY in 2003 revealed that there were about 74 300 NEY in the second quarter of 2002, representing about 8% of the youth population in Hong Kong. The percentage of NEY was higher in the new towns (8.6%), and in areas like Yuen Long (10.4%), Tin Shui Wai (10.8%), Northern New Territories (9.2%) and Tai Po (9.2%). About 34.6% of them had only lower secondary education or below.

2.26 The latest estimate of the NEY population (up to first quarter of 2007) was 49 000, representing about 5.4% of youth population in Hong Kong. The percentage of NEY was higher among males (at 6.4%) than among females (4.5%)[5].

2.27 In sum, the number of NEY in Hong Kong has been decreasing between the second quarter of 2002 and the first quarter of 2007. It is believed that the efforts made by the Government and NGOs to help NEY find employment or resume schooling, as well as the improving economic and labour market conditions in recent years have all contributed to the reduction in the size of NEY population in Hong Kong.

Youth Household Survey: Latest Information of the NEY in Our Community

2.28 In order to have a general picture of the prevalence of NEY in our community, the research team conducted a household survey in mid-2007 to obtain the latest information on NEY in Hong Kong.

2.29 The survey was conducted during the period from 29 January 2007 to 15 May 2007 through face-to-face household interviews of a representative sample of about 1 500

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[4] "Youth population" in *2.24 – 2.26* above refers to the population of young people aged between 15 and 24 in Hong Kong.

[5] Source: Statistics based on the General Household Survey, Census and Statistics Department.

youths. A total of 3 120 living quarters were randomly selected from the Frame of Quarters maintained by the Census and Statistics Department, among which 2 645 were found to be eligible living quarters and 1 988 of them were successfully enumerated. Among the living quarters enumerated, 1 500 respondents aged 12 - 29 were interviewed. The major findings set out in *2.30 – 2.31* below cover only respondents aged between 15 and 24, who account for 61% (922 in number) of all respondents.

2.30 Some of the major findings about respondents aged between 15 and 24 are set out as follows -

(a) About 54% of the respondents were male and the remaining 46% were female; and

(b) More than half (67%) of the respondents were students and another 28% were employed. Only about 5% (48 respondents) were not-at-school and not-at-work (i.e. non-engaged).

2.31 On the specific findings about the respondents who were non-engaged, it is noted that –

(a) None of the respondents aged between 15 and 16 were non-engaged. The percentage of the respondents who were non-engaged ranged from 6% for those aged 17 to 23% for those aged 24, with those aged 24 and 20 having the highest percentage of non-engaged respondents (23% and 21% respectively);

(b) Among the non-engaged respondents, a slightly higher proportion was male (52%), as compared to that for female (48%);

(c) About 81% of the non-engaged respondents were without a job and were seeking one. The remaining 19% were without a job and not seeking one. Among those who were not seeking a job, about 33% did not do so because they thought that no job was suitable or they believed that no job was available; 33% were preparing to resume studies; 11% were having health problems; and the remaining 22 % simply did not want to work;

(d) Nearly 75% of the non-engaged respondents were worried about their

unemployment, while 17% indicated that they were only a bit worried/not quite worried or even not worried at all and the remaining 8% gave no comment;

(e) About 69% of the non-engaged respondents had used services provided by community organizations and the Government. The corresponding percentage was higher for those who were students (86%);

(f) About 85% of the non-engaged respondents had not sought assistance from the employment services or participated in the training programmes funded by the Government. For those who had no plan to attend other study/training courses in the next 12 months (83%), the main reasons were that they had no interest (50%) or saw no need (25%) to do so; and

(g) The indexes of self-esteem, parent-child relationship and availability of help/support were relatively lower for non-engaged respondents than for other groups of respondents (e.g. those who were employed, students and home-makers).

3. REVIEW OF EXISTING TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES FOR YOUTH

Existing Education, Training and Employment Programmes for Youth

3.1 The Task Force notes that a wide variety of education, vocational training and employment programmes are currently available for young people, including NEY, in Hong Kong. With a view to examining the effectiveness of these programmes in addressing the needs of NEY, the Task Force has reviewed, at the macro level, six existing education, training and employment programmes for young people, including NEY. The review is covered in the "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong" commissioned by the Task Force.

3.2 The six programmes chosen for the review are -

(a) **Basic Craft Certificate (BCC) Courses** organized by the Vocational Training Council (VTC);

(b) **Project Yi-Jin (PYJ)** co-ordinated by the Education Bureau (EDB);

(c) **Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP)** launched by the Labour Department (LD);

(d) **Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS)** launched by the LD;

(e) **"FARM"** project organized by the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong; and

(f) **Youth Employment Start-up Programme (YES)** operated by the Youth Outreach.

Main Features of Individual Programmes

3.3 The **BCC courses** provide a school-based but career-oriented learning opportunity at the most elementary level, allowing Secondary 3 school-leavers to learn trade-specific skills for future employment. Participants will undergo one year full-time pre-employment training at craft level in specific trades.

3.4 **PYJ** provides an alternative pathway for young school leavers and adult learners aged 21 or above who want to pursue further education. It aims to upgrade school leavers' knowledge, through combining academic pursuits with practical skills training in biliteracy, trilingualism, and application of information technology. Successful completion of the programme will lead to a qualification comparable to five passes in the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination for the purpose of continuing education and employment.

3.5 The **YPTP** aims to enhance the employability and competitiveness of young school leavers aged between 15 and 19, get them prepared to enter the employment market and help them draw up career plans. Apart from a wide range of modular training on leadership, interpersonal, computer and job-specific skills, the programme also provides workplace attachment training as well as career counseling and support services.

3.6 The **YWETS** is targeted at young people aged between 15 and 24 with education attainment below degree level. It provides a work-based learning opportunity for those having little work experience and few job skills but with strong job-motivation to build credentials for future employment. Participants will receive soft skills training and on-the-job training of six to 12 months under the guidance of mentors appointed by employers. Additional support such as counseling service is available from case managers who are registered social workers.

3.7 The **"FARM"** project, which is organized by the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong in collaboration with the Eastern District Office and a local youth magazine ("MILK" magazine), aims to promote positive development of youth through training and experiential learning in entrepreneurship. A series of cultural events and activities are held at Victory Park on Sundays to provide opportunities for young people, including the youth-at-risk, to demonstrate their talents and creativity. It comprises three main parts, including "Flea Market", "Youth Cultural Square" and "Creative Factory". "Flea Market" allows young people to sell their own creative and innovative products; "Youth Cultural Square" hosts a variety of events and performances that help to promote local culture; and "Creative Factory" provides training and advice to those young people who want to start their own business to sell the products they make.

3.8 The **YES** programme operated by Youth Outreach provides youth-at-risk aged between 15 and 24 with job training, guidance and actual work experience to help them acquire work skills and develop proper work habit for entering the labour market. Participants will gain experience working in a variety of posts/industries such as convenient store, café, hair salon and express delivery company etc. Job referral and follow-up services are also provided to help them secure employment.

Effectiveness of the Existing Programmes

3.9 The Task Force notes that the six existing education, training and employment programmes are generally effective in helping young people, in particular NEY, in the following ways:

(a) acquiring formal qualifications;
(b) strengthening school-to-work linkage;
(c) gaining a foothold in the labour market; and
(d) fostering a greater connection with the society.

Acquiring Formal Qualifications

3.10 It is generally agreed that young people without sufficient qualifications hardly have the opportunity to enter the workforce and secure stable employment. The BCC courses and the PYJ both offer formal and recognized qualification to their graduates. The former aims to provide trade-specific qualification for their graduates so as to help them secure employment in specific trades, while the latter provides an alternative route for low-achievers and dropouts from conventional schools to pursue continuing education. In other words, the recognized qualifications offered by these programmes enhance the employability of young people on the one hand, and facilitate their access to further learning opportunities on the other.

Strengthening the Linkage between Education and Work

3.11 There was little concern over the issues relating to school-to-work transition and career planning in the past. On leaving school, many young people at present fail to prepare themselves for a working life which demands not only a range of qualifications and skills but also a mindset and adaptability that are readily marketable in the existing fast-evolving, knowledge-based and service-oriented

economy. The BCC courses provide skills training in real-life industrial settings to help trainees acquire trade-specific skills and get familiarized with the world of work. The PYJ emphasizes the school-to-work linkage by introducing career-related knowledge in the curriculum to facilitate personal growth and development of inter-personal skills. The YPTP also places considerable emphasis on helping young school leavers cultivate a proper attitude towards employment through various soft skills training and workplace attachment.

Gaining a Foothold in the Labour Market

3.12 The YWETS, "FARM" project and YES programme provide a youth-friendly work environment that helps young people experience a smoother process in gaining a foothold in the labour market. Through the provision of pre-employment and on-the-job training and employment opportunities, the YWETS enables their trainees, especially the first-time job seekers, to overcome barriers to initial employment and accumulate work experience for further employment. By providing a low-cost platform for creative performance and business, the "FARM" project helps young people to actualize their creativity and potential, promote self-employment, and create an alternative pathway to the labour market. The on-the-job training, job referral and follow-up services provided by the YES programme also help the youth-at-risk to understand the business world and secure employment.

Fostering a Greater Connection with the Society

3.13 One of the main challenges encountered by vulnerable youth is acceptance by the society at large. Unemployed, young school drop-outs are often stereotyped as being "lazy", "irresponsible", "anti-social" and "a burden to the society", which further undermines their confidence and self-esteem. The "FARM" project has tried to transform these negative images by demonstrating the creativity of youth culture, thereby helping the participants to regain self-confidence and re-integrate into the society. Instead of providing classroom training, the YES programme allows participants to work in real business settings where they can learn and practise their inter- and intra-personal communication skills. The participants also get market wage and bonus for their work and hence gain real experience in understanding the reward system in the business world.

Success Factors for Education, Training and Employment Programmes for Youth

3.14 The Task Force recognizes that each of the six programmes focuses on certain particular dimensions of youth engagement, such as training on vocational skills, upgrading of foundation skills, nurturing personal attributes etc., and has its own strengths and limitations. The Task Force also acknowledges that it would be very difficult to design and implement a one-size-fits-all programme for young people with different backgrounds and capacities. Yet, it has identified some key factors which are crucial for the success of education, training and employment programmes for youth. They are –

(a) **Offering appropriate information and guidance.** To make full use of the resources available to facilitate youth engagement, it is essential to keep young people well informed of and facilitate their access to the existing services and programmes. Organizers should thus ensure that relevant programme information is made available and easily accessible for the young people.

(b) **Having caring, knowledgeable and skilful workers/advisors**. Career guidance and counseling service is an important part in education, training and employment programmes for youth, particularly for NEY with low motivation and weak social support network, so as to connect them with suitable services and programmes that meet their needs. Successful programmes should be staffed by experienced, caring and professional workers/advisors with relevant skills and knowledge to provide the necessary assistance and support to young people throughout the process of engagement.

(c) **Fostering collaboration among stakeholders**. Given the heterogeneous needs of youth and rapid changes in social and economic structure, the goal of promoting youth engagement can no longer be achieved by the efforts of one sector alone. To ensure effective implementation of the programmes and achieve better synergy, collaboration as well as co-ordination should be promoted so as to pool together the expertise and resources of various stakeholders including relevant government bureax/departments, NGOs, training institutions and employers.

4. PILOT PROJECTS ON EMPLOYMENT-RELATED TRAINING FOR NEY

Pilot Projects for NEY

4.1 Noting that a wide variety of education, training and employment programmes are currently available for young people in general, including the NEY, the Task Force considers that pilot projects catering for the specific needs of NEY could be launched and trial run to engage them meaningfully and foster the promotion of opportunities for training, placement and employment for them. Based on the recommendations of the report on "Continuing Development and Employment Opportunities for Youth" by CoY, the Task Force has identified five key areas where pilot projects and services for NEY can be further developed. They are -

(a) programmes that aim at motivating NEY to seek self-improvement and work;
(b) modern apprenticeship schemes;
(c) training for sports-related careers;
(d) training for creative and cultural industries; and
(e) training and employment programmes in the Mainland.

4.2 NGOs were invited to propose and apply for funding support for pilot projects falling within the five strategic categories mentioned in *4.1* above during the period from April 2004 to April 2006. The Fund supported up to 70% of the total expenditure of individual approved projects and organizers were required to cover at least 30% of the expenditure to demonstrate their commitment. A total of 24 pilot projects received funding approval from the Task Force. 22 of them have been launched and completed, one was withdrawn upon approval and another has not commenced because of insufficient enrolment. A full list of the pilot projects is at Annex C.

Evaluation of the Pilot Projects supported by the Fund

4.3 The Task Force has commissioned an independent research team to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of the pilot projects supported by the Fund. The evaluation is covered in the "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong".

4.4 The research team has conducted a pre-post project analysis focusing on the impact of the projects on the participants. Quantitative information was obtained from the participants through three rounds of questionnaires - one at the beginning, another one at least three months after completion of the programmes and the last one at least six months after completion of the programmes. Follow-up telephone interviews were also conducted with those who had dropped out before the programmes ended. In addition, in-depth interviews and focus group meetings were conducted with the organizers as well as other parties involved including employers, other training bodies and social workers. The major findings on the 22 projects launched and completed are set out in the following paragraphs.

Profile of Participants

4.5 The Task Force notes that the participants recruited in the pilot projects were mainly –

(a) aged between 15 and 19 (71%);

(b) NEY with only Secondary 5 education or below, who had left school for a fairly long period of time (some 19 months on average), but were out of work for a relatively short period of time (some seven months on average);

(c) living in remote areas in the New Territories such as Yuen Long and Tuen Mun or districts that are relatively less well-off such as Kwun Tong, Sha Tin and Kwai Tsing ;

(d) youth with fairly low self-esteem, as compared with other young people aged between 15 and 24 in Hong Kong; and

(e) youth who had not participated in any training and employment programmes organized by the Government and NGOs.

4.6 The Task Force notes the research team's comments that the 22 pilot projects on the whole were successful in recruiting the right participants, for whom the projects were designed for, who were yet to benefit from the existing training and employment programmes and thus most in need of assistance.

Effectiveness of the Projects

General findings

4.7 The pilot projects have in general raised the self-esteem of participants and helped NEY become more meaningfully engaged. The majority of participants (68%) were neither at school nor at work before commencement of pilot projects. The number of NEY dropped significantly and such group only accounted for 19.5% of all participants three months after completion of training.

4.8 The average drop-out rate for the pilot projects was 21% and about 44% of the drop-outs remained non-engaged. As compared with other participants, the drop-outs were relatively younger, had lower education level and self-esteem, and had been out of school or out of work for a longer period of time. The main reasons quoted by the drop-outs include: they wanted to find or had already found a job; they wanted to resume studies; and training was considered not suitable for them. A higher proportion of drop-outs lived in the more remote areas such as Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, Tai Po, Sha Tin, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing.

Individual categories of projects

4.9 **Self-enhancement and training programmes** (*4.1(a) refers*) mainly cater for NEY who are young with low self-esteem and low education level (Secondary 3 or below). Most of the seven projects launched are quite successful in motivating and equipping participants to return to school or find a job. While recruitment and retention of unmotivated NEY, including hidden youths who are supposed to be mostly in need, is extremely difficult, some NGOs with a strong outreach network and a holistic service approach manage to overcome the problem.

4.10 **Modern apprenticeship schemes** (*4.1(b) refers*) include vocational training and work elements and hence are more suitable for mature NEY. Close liaison and co-operation among NGOs, social workers and employers is required to equip participants vocationally and help them find employment. Most of the five projects launched are found to be successful in re-engaging NEY participants and enhancing their self-esteem.

4.11 Among the 22 completed projects, there are only three **sports-related training programmes** (*4.1(c) refers*) which, to a certain extent, reflect the difficulties

involved in organizing such programmes. Unlike vocational training in other disciplines, connections among NGOs, training bodies (e.g. sports associations) and potential employers (e.g. schools) have yet to be fully developed. The availability of employment opportunities for NEY in the sports sector is also uncertain. It is important for organizers to secure support from the relevant parties in order to successfully launch the projects and assist participants in finding employment.

4.12 Only three **projects related to creative and cultural industries** (*4.1(d) refers*) have been launched. While there are job opportunities available in the creative and cultural industries, competition at the operative/craftsman level is keen and the work requirements are demanding. NEY with an interest and the right aptitude to work in the industries should be trained in technical as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

4.13 Participants recruited in the **training and employment programmes in the Mainland** (*4.1(e) refers*) were generally more motivated and had higher education level. While job opportunities are available in the Mainland especially in the Pearl River Delta Region, it is important to ensure that NEY are adequately trained and psychologically prepared to work there. It is worth noting that many young people in Hong Kong, including NEY, have reservation in working in the Mainland because of safety concerns. This is reflected by the fact that a few participants of a Mainland pilot project declined job offers given to them.

Sustainability of the Projects

Sustainability of the impact of the projects

4.14 Most participants have shown continued enhancement in their self-esteem, as confirmed by follow-up interviews conducted at least three months and six months after completion of training. In particular, the increase in self-esteem is more marked for participants with lower self-esteem before. For illustrative purpose, among the participants with a self-esteem index[6] in the range of 2.01 to 2.50 (who constituted 9.2% of all participants) three months after training, 4.1% had their self-esteem index raised to 2.51-3.00 and another 1% raised to 3.01-3.50 six months after completion of training. For participants with a self-esteem index in the range of 3.01 to 3.50 (who constituted 18% of all participants) three months after

[6] The self-esteem index ranges from the lowest of 1.00 to the highest of 4.00.

completion of training, only 1.9% had their self-esteem index further raised to 3.50-4.00 six months after completion of training.

4.15 The pilot projects also have a sustained impact on the engagement of the participants. The proportion of the participants being non-engaged has dropped from 68% of all participants before training to 19.5% three months after completion of training, and further decreased to 14.8% six months after completion of training. The lasting impact may also be demonstrated by the finding that among those who were non-engaged three months after completion of training (19.5%), 4% had returned to school and another 7.8% had found a job six months after completion of training. Only a small proportion (7.7%) remained to be non-engaged.

Continuation of services

4.16 Among the 22 projects[7] supported by the Fund, the organizers of nine have secured funding for running similar programmes after expiry of support from the Fund, while the organizers of another nine projects have not offered similar programmes.

4.17 As regards the nine projects for which continuous funding has been secured, the sources of funding include internal resources of the organizations concerned; other government funding (e.g. "奔向朝陽計劃" under Social Welfare Department (SWD) and "Enhancing Self-reliance through District Partnership Programme" under Home Affairs Department (HAD)); sponsorship from non-governmental funding bodies (e.g. the Community Chest); service charges; or a mix of various funding sources. Modifications have also been made to these programmes, such as expanding the target groups to cover youth-at-risk in addition to NEY, increasing the diversity of training, strengthening the element of pre-employment training, etc.

4.18 For the remaining nine projects which have ceased operation, the organizers of five projects indicated that they had plans to run similar programmes/services and were seeking resources. The organizers of the remaining four projects had no plans to offer similar programmes and the main reasons quoted include: the services offered under the pilot projects were not among the main service areas of the organizers

[7] For the purpose of counting the total number of projects supported by the Fund, if a project was carried out in two phases but its organizer had submitted separate applications for funding support for each phase, the two phases were counted as two separate projects. A total of eight such projects (i.e. four projects, with each implemented in two phases) were involved. Since four projects out of the 22 projects were phase-one projects, the sustainability study only covered 18 projects.

concerned; lack of experienced staff in overseeing the projects; lack of resources; etc.

Limitations in Organizing and Implementing Projects for NEY

4.19 The Task Force recognizes that the backgrounds, interests and needs of NEY are highly diverse and subject to change over time. While the pilot projects have been designed having regard to the specific needs and abilities of NEY, it is difficult in practice for any single organizer to offer training and job attachments in great variety of trades in order to fully meet the different and diverse needs of the participants. Besides, it is doubtful as to whether participants of the right aptitude, abilities and interests could be matched with suitable type(s) of training and job attachment offered under a particular project through admission interviews arranged by the organizer, however well planned and carefully conducted they are. The expectations of the participants may not be easily addressed by the training and services offered under the pilot projects.

4.20 The Task Force also notes that the publicity and promotional activities mounted by the organizers may attract the more motivated NEY, but probably not the unmotivated ones. For projects and programmes catering for NEY, it is important that the organizers should be highly aware of the motivation level of NEY and invest more efforts to reach and recruit those with low or no motivation who are most in need.

4.21 Some employers remarked that one of the common shortcomings of NEY participants was that they often tended to be over-confident and lacked a realistic idea of actual working conditions and work requirements. While the employers asked for adequate pre-employment training to be provided to the participants, the participants were reported to be impatient with durative training. The disparity between the expectations of the employers and the participants thus need to be carefully addressed.

Success Factors for Projects for NEY

4.22 The Task Force acknowledges that there are difficulties in engaging NEY, equipping them vocationally and motivating them to seek further education, training or employment. Yet, the Task Force notes that the more successful pilot projects are those the organizers of which have the ability and network to –

(a) reach out to the NEY (especially those who are less motivated to seek training);

(b) arrange vocational and skills training that matches both the ability and interests of the participants and needs of employers;

(c) provide counseling and training in interpersonal and intrapersonal skills for the participants, and

(d) solicit support from employers to provide on-the-job training and subsequent employment opportunities.

4.23 The Task Force is pleased to know that the organizers of a number of pilot projects have successfully secured continuous funding support to sustain their services for NEY. The Task Force notes that while the Government is willing to provide seed money through various established funding schemes, as appropriate, to support the initiation of worthy projects for NEY and to distill from them the successful formula, training providers and NGOs are strongly encouraged to build closer partnerships and collaborate with the private sector and other non-governmental funding bodies with a view to soliciting more community support and participation in sustaining their services for NEY.

5. TRAINING PROGRAMMES AND ACTIVITIES FOR YOUTH WORKERS AND PARENTS

Training the trainers

5.1 Youth workers[8] play a key role in the delivery of support services for NEY. Apart from fostering the promotion of opportunities for training, placement and employment of NEY, the Task Force considers that professional training for youth workers is also of paramount importance such that they are equipped in turn with the necessary skills and knowledge in providing timely and appropriate guidance and support for young people in need.

5.2 While many youth workers possess rich frontline social work experience, the Task Force is of the view that further training could be provided to enhance their understanding of the characteristics of NEY and skills in rekindling their motivation to study or work. In this connection, the Task Force commissioned the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) to provide a train-the-trainer programme for frontline workers, and develop a set of Teaching Kit and Resource Kit for youth service providers and secondary schools to facilitate training on career planning services for young people.

5.3 During the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people also count on the advice and guidance of teachers and parents to overcome their problems and plan for their future. The Task Force thus also sees the need for teachers and parents to understand the causes of and the problems faced by NEY, and the roles they have in preventing young people from becoming non-engaged. To this end, a series of seminars and sharing sessions were held for secondary school teachers and parents to promote their awareness of NEY-related issues.

5.4 The Task Force also appreciates the value and importance of promoting community support and involvement in tackling problems relating to NEY. With a view to tapping community resources and encouraging community participation in facilitating youth engagement, the Task Force sponsored a mentorship programme engaging retired persons as mentors to share their experience with and provide guidance for NEY.

[8] "Youth workers" in this context refers to those involved in the provision of youth services, such as social workers, counselors and instructors of vocational training programmes for youth. Teachers who work in the education set-ups are NOT included.

Training Programme for Youth Workers

5.5 With the support of the Fund, HKCSS launched a Train-the-trainer Programme for frontline workers, including social workers and counseling officers providing youth services as well as vocational training instructors, from March 2005 to March 2006.

5.6 To better meet the training needs and expectations of the frontline workers, HKCSS convened a Focus Group Meeting in July 2004 to invite initial ideas and suggestions from nine youth service agencies on the contents and arrangements of the training programme. A survey was then conducted to collect feedback from more than 60 organizations providing youth employment services and the Vocational Training Council on the proposed thematic courses to be offered under the programme.

5.7 Having regard to the views of the frontline workers, the training programme was designed with focuses on enhancing their understanding of the needs and characteristics of NEY, knowledge and techniques in the application of career assessment tools, as well as practical skills in dealing with NEY and providing career planning services. A total of 33 training courses falling under four categories were organised. They include –

(a) Two *Foundation Courses on Career Development Services* (生涯發展服務基礎課程) for social workers/counseling officers with little experience in youth service and fresh graduates who are about to enter the service;

(b) Four Comprehensive *Training Courses on Career Development Services* (生涯發展服務全科進階課程) for social workers/counseling officers with at least two years' experience in youth employment and training service;

(c) Sixteen *Elective Courses on Career Development Services* (生涯發展服務選修課程) for social workers/counseling officers engaging in general youth service; and

(d) Eleven *Courses on Vocational Training for Youth* (青少年職業技能培訓導師訓練課程) for instructors of vocational or related training.

Separately, six information seminars were also organized for social workers/counseling officers engaging in general youth service.

5.8 Training places were over-subscribed and the training programme recorded 1 706 number of attendance (involving 1 087 social workers/counseling officers and vocational training instructors) in total. More than 80% of the participants found the courses/seminars useful and were satisfied with the training contents and arrangements.

5.9 To make better use of the training contents developed and facilitate individual youth service providers and secondary schools to organize training on career planning services for young people, a set of Teaching Kit and Resource Kit was produced and distributed to all public-funded secondary schools and organizations providing youth employment services in Hong Kong. In response to the feedback received from schools and youth workers, a training workshop and a day camp were subsequently conducted to further elaborate on the application of the Teaching Kit and Resource Kit, recording an attendance of 360 social workers and teachers.

Seminars-cum-sharing Sessions for Teachers and Parents

5.10 In addition to the training programme for youth workers, the Task Force sponsored a seminar-cum-sharing session for teachers of secondary schools in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long where NEY population is relatively larger. The seminar, organized by Caritas Hong Kong and held in June 2006, aimed at strengthening teachers' skills in supporting students with low motivation in school and introducing ways to rekindle motivation of young people for meaningful engagement. Some 20 teachers attended the seminar and most of them found it effective in helping them improve their skills in dealing with de-motivated students in their daily work.

5.11 Separately, the Task Force commissioned five NGOs[9] to organize a series of seminars-cum-sharing sessions for parents, in particular those of NEY and youth-at-risk from June 2006 to August 2007. The seminars focused on enhancing parents' understanding of the education, training and employment opportunities available for their children, their role in helping their children make career choices, as well as the needs of young people nowadays. A total of 21 seminars were held[10] with an overall attendance of 626 parents. Most of the participants indicated that the seminars had helped them better understand the problems faced by their children

[9] The five organizations are Caritas Hong Kong, Salvation Army, Chinese Y.M.C.A. of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Y.W.C.A., and Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups.

[10] One seminar was held for each of the 18 districts in Hong Kong, except for the Islands, Tsuen Wan and Yau Tsim Mong Districts where two seminars were held, either due to scattered population among the islands or unsatisfactory enrolment of the first seminar held.

and how they could motivate and facilitate their children to draw up educational/career plans.

Mentorship Programme for NEY

5.12 Organized by the Methodist Centre and supported by the Fund, a mentorship programme targeting retired persons as mentors and NEY as mentees was launched. The programme aimed not only to involve community participation in helping and supporting the NEY, but also to encourage NEY to develop positive life values and attitudes through learning from the experience of their mentors.

5.13 Retired persons were recruited as mentors for they often possess rich life experience and are more likely to be able to commit more time on providing care and guidance for the NEY mentees. Training was provided to the mentors before initiation of the mentor-mentee relationship, with special emphasis on understanding of the characteristics of NEY and skills in communicating with and rendering support to them.

5.14 As regards the programme design, each mentee was matched with a mentor having regard to their backgrounds and expectations, and each pair of mentor and mentee took part jointly in various activities, such as group gatherings and volunteer work, which helped to enhance mutual understanding, promote exchange and communications, and develop a caring mentor-mentee relationship eventually. A one-to-two week workplace attachment was also arranged for the mentees, and their mentors provided one-to-one support and advice during the process.

5.15 The programme was launched in October 2006 and completed in October 2007. 12 pairs of mentor and mentee were successfully matched, and six pairs of them maintained regular contacts after the programme has ended. All of the participating mentees had shown improvements in self-confidence, communication skills and work attitudes after joining the programme, and most of them were satisfied with the mentoring experience and relevant arrangements. Most of the mentors agreed that the programme had enhanced their understanding of NEY and skills in dealing with and supporting them. They also found the mentoring experience challenging and meaningful.

6. LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF NEY

Research on learning difficulties and psychological problems of NEY in Hong Kong

6.1 The Task Force notes that among the NEY in Hong Kong, some have demonstrated signs of learning difficulties and psychological problems of different degrees. Although there is no research evidence yet to support the causal relationship between "the prevalence of learning difficulties and psychological problems" and "being non-engaged", their correlation may suggest that young people with these problems are more susceptible to being non-engaged. Given so, the Task Force sees the need to conduct a research study to assess the prevalence of learning difficulties and psychological problems among NEY in Hong Kong and examine specifically the needs of NEY with these problems.

6.2 A research team led by Professor LAI CHENG Ching-gea, Centre-in-charge of Manulife Centre for Children with Specific Learning Disabilities, Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Professor Howard CHENG Chi-ho, Associate Head of Department of Applied Social Sciences, Hong Kong Polytechnic University was commissioned in April 2006 to conduct a study entitled "Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of NEY in Hong Kong". The study aims to look into the relationship between the prevalence of learning difficulties and psychological problems among young people and their becoming non-engaged, develop an experimental screening instrument for identification of NEY who may have learning difficulties and/or psychological problems, identify the service gaps in the existing identification and intervention mechanisms, and make recommendations on how best to assist NEY with these problems.

6.3 The definition of NEY adopted in the study is the same as that in CoY's report (*2.23 refers)*, which is also in line with the other study entitled "Research on Training and Employment Programme for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong" commissioned by the Task Force. The major findings of the study are summarized in the following paragraphs.

NEY and Learning difficulties

6.4 According to a local study conducted recently by the Hong Kong Specific Learning Difficulties Research Team (Chan, Ho, Tsang, Lee & Chung, 2007) with a normative sample of 690 children, the prevalence rate of specific learning difficulties in reading and writing in Hong Kong should range from 9.7% to 12.6%. There are other studies suggesting that such rate should be much higher among the NEY population (McBride and Siegel, 1997; Barwick and Siegel, 1996).

6.5 Learning difficulties are less visible than other physical, sensory or mobility impairments and thus are known as "hidden" disabilities. The needs of students with learning difficulties are not as readily understood and accepted as the needs of students with more overt disabilities (e.g. visual, hearing or orthopedic impairments). Besides, students with learning difficulties often deny their learning problems, intending to distance themselves from the special education label they carry in elementary and secondary schools (Janiga, 2002).

6.6 Poor academic performance makes those young people with learning difficulties more unlikely to complete school. Numerous studies indicate that students with learning difficulties are at risk of not completing high school. School dropout may be the end result of a developmental trajectory that begins with frustrations and difficulties in the school experience and negative self-evaluations associated with learning problems (Rourke, 1998; Mungovan & O'Day, 1996).

6.7 Apart from school and study, learning difficulties may also affect one's work and other facets in life. As suggested by Mathews, Whang and Fawcett (1982), adolescents with learning difficulties are usually deficient in some important social skills as well, and have greater difficulties in joining and staying in the workforce. Besides, adolescents with learning difficulties tend to be less mature in their attitude towards work, and they are also not competent enough to explore and identify their career options (Rojewski, 1999). In fact, higher rates of unemployment and underemployment are reported among adults with learning difficulties (Dowdy, Carter & Smith, 1990), and the unemployment rate of adults with learning difficulties varies from 20% to more than 60% in the United States (Rojewski, 1999).

NEY and Psychological problems

6.8 Numerous studies on the psychological well-being of early school leavers and jobless youth provide convergent evidence to suggest the positive relationship between non-engagement and vulnerabilities in psychological well-being.

6.9 Persistent and recurrent academic failure and experiences of early school dropout provoke emotional difficulties such as a greater level of stress (Roeser, Eccles & Strobel, 1998), loneliness and anxiety (Geisthardt & Munsch, 1996), somatic complaints (Willcutt & Pennington, 2000), as well as sleep problems, suicidal ideations and depression (Huntington & Bender, 2001).

6.10 Unemployment undermines the sense of purpose in life, reduces social contacts, results in a loss of status and identity, removes an individual from regular activities, and develops a feeling of hopelessness (Jahoda, 1982 and 1988). There is considerable evidence showing that unemployed persons experience a fair amount of disruption in their social relationships and contacts with relatives and friends, and develop a tendency to withdraw from clubs and groups (Atkinson, Lien, & Liem, 1986; Coffield, Borrill, & Marshall, 1983; Martin & Wallace, 1985). Besides, prolonged non-engagement from work hampers one's psychological well-being, which may in turn impair perception of self-worth or self-esteem (Goldsmith, Veum & Darity, 1997).

6.11 Coupled with a series of biological, cognitive and social changes, young people who do not have any formal and meaningful engagement are more vulnerable to psychological or psychiatric problems. A recent local study suggested that about 7.8% of a sample of 192 hidden youths were diagnosed with psychiatric disorders, and another 9.3% showed some symptoms of psychiatric disorders (Hong Kong Christian Service, 2007).

6.12 Among various psychological problems, depression is frequently present during adolescence (Petersen et al., 1993). According to a study conducted in 1999, the prevalence rate of depression among young people aged 15-24 in Hong Kong was 16% (Hong Kong Mood Disorders Center, 2001). As for anxiety, which often co-exists with depression among young people, the prevalence rate among young people aged 15 - 24 in Hong Kong was 17% (Hong Kong Mood Disorders Center, 2001). Among the hidden youth in Hong Kong, it was reported that about 28% of them showed depressed mood, 16% were easily anxious, 40% feared social contact,

34% were emotionally disturbed, 30% were easily agitated and 13% suffered from insomnia (Hong Kong Christian Service, 2007).

Screening tool for identification of NEY who may have learning difficulties and/or psychological problems

6.13 With a view to facilitating assessment of the prevalence of learning difficulties and psychological problems among NEY in Hong Kong, the research team has attempted to develop an initial and experimental screening tool for identification of NEY who may have learning difficulties and/or psychological problems (S-NEY).

6.14 Given the heterogeneous nature of learning difficulties, the research team has focused the scope of learning difficulties being examined mainly on behaviours that are more closely related to carrying out reading and writing tasks at school, which in turn are more relevant to teenagers' academic failure in conventional mainstream schools. In other words, the NEY subjects who are regarded as having potential learning difficulties in the study are mainly those with reading and/or writing-related potential learning difficulties.

Development and Composition of S-NEY

6.15 The S-NEY, which consists of three parallel forms/questionnaires for collecting information from NEY subjects (SNEY-Form A), frontline workers dealing with them (SNEY-Form B), and their family members (SNEY-Form C) respectively, serves mainly to –

(a) provide a quantitative measure to assess the risk and extent of non-engagement;
(b) identify those who may have learning difficulties; and
(c) assess the level of psychological distress.

6.16 The SNEY-Form A aims to uncover the characteristics and daily life experience of the NEY subjects. Information collected covers the following areas -

(a) current activity status;
(b) school and work experiences;
(c) motivation towards transition to employment or re-admission to school;
(d) attitude towards his or her own life;
(e) strengths, interests and short-term goals;
(f) pattern of daily activities;
(g) relationships with and support from family members and peers;

(h) coping behaviours; and

(i) screening of learning disabilities and psychological distress.

6.17 The SNEY-Form B requires frontline workers to provide information pertaining to the behaviour and performance of the NEY subjects in learning/training centres. The SNEY-Form C serves to understand the NEY subjects from their parents' perspective, including their developmental background, academic and social performance, and relationships with family members.

6.18 To facilitate the identification of subjects who may have learning difficulties and psychological problems, a newly developed instrument named as Learning Difficulties Screening (LDS) and an adaptation of General Health Questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) (Goldburg, 1972) were included in S-NEY Form A for NEY subjects.

Screening for learning difficulties

6.19 LDS was developed having regard to the result of a pilot validation study[11] conducted by the research team in November 2006, as well as feedback and advice collected from the Steering Committee on the study established under the Task Force, experienced secondary school teachers, young adults interviewed who have learning difficulties and overseas expert in learning difficulties (Professor Linda Siegel, Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education, University of British Columbia). The final version of the LDS consists of 50 items requiring subjects to rate, using a frequency scale of three responses ("0-never"; "1-sometimes" and "2-most of the time"), on how frequent they encounter the problems relating to learning difficulties. The maximum score is 100.

6.20 Taking into account the findings from a series of analysis (e.g. Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) Curves analysis) and pilot studies conducted, the research team adopted a cut-off score of 24 for LDS. In other words, subjects with LDS score of 24 or above (screened-in subjects) would be taken as potential cases of having learning difficulties in reading and writing. Nevertheless, in view that the cut-off score of 24 would yield a sensitivity rate of 90% and yet a false positive rate of 52.5%, subjects with LDS score of 24 or above would be further invited to take a

[11] To explore the psychometric properties of the LDS, a checklist consisting of 63 items was administered to 260 Secondary 3 and Secondary 4 students, who were mainly from band 2-3 secondary schools in Hong Kong, in November 2006.

follow-up test during which a test battery consisting of four tasks, including rapid naming task, one-minute reading, Chinese character naming and Chinese word dictation, would be administered. The follow-up test served to work in complementary with the LDS by removing false positive cases from those screened in by the LDS. Those whose performance was relatively weak[12] in at least one of the tasks in the follow-up test would be identified as having potential learning difficulties.

Screening for psychological problems

6.21 GHQ-28, which has been widely used in research and clinical settings, was adapted and incorporated in the S-NEY Form A to facilitate identification of NEY subjects who may have psychological problems. The effectiveness of GHQ-28 as a screening instrument for identifying community respondents who may need psychiatric consultation has been demonstrated to transcend language and cultural barriers (Benjamin et al., 1992; Duncan-Jones et al., 1986). In addition to generating a total score for measuring psychological distress and potential psychiatric disorders amongst NEY, GHQ-28 yields scores on four symptom areas, including somatic symptoms, anxiety/insomnia symptoms, social dysfunction, and severe depression. It consists of 28 items and the maximum score is 28.

6.22 With reference to some pilot studies conducted and the current practice in some local post-secondary counseling settings, the research team adopted a cut-off score of 8 for GHQ-28. Subjects with GHQ score of 8 or above would be regarded as potential cases with significant psychological distress. They would be invited to attend a follow-up interview session, known as Structural Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I disorders (SCID), conducted by a clinical psychologist. The interview serves to confirm and identify the psychological and psychiatric problems among the screened-in subjects.

Major findings about NEY subjects

6.23 A total of 428 subjects were successfully interviewed with SNEY-Form A. Due to time constraints and difficulties in recruitment of subjects, the studied sample

[12] Performance of the screened-in subjects in each of the tasks would be compared with the reference scores for the tasks. The reference scores were obtained from a pilot study conducted from November 2006 to April 2007 with the participation of 213 Secondary 3 and Secondary 4 students recruited from the sample of secondary school students. Subjects whose performance in a task was one standard deviation below the mean of the reference score would be regarded as being relatively weak in the area represented by the task.

comprised both NEY subjects (307 in number) and those who were at risk of becoming NEY (121). The major findings set out below pertain to those relating to the NEY subjects only.

NEY subjects with potential learning difficulties

6.24 Among the 307 NEY subjects sampled, 129 (42%) yielded LDS score of 24 or above and were subsequently invited to sit for the follow-up test. 83 out of the 129 screened-in subjects took the test.

6.25 Out of the 83 tested subjects, 52 (62.7%) performed relatively weakly in at least one of the tasks and hence were identified as having potential learning difficulties. Based on the assumptions that subjects with LDS score below 24 were not having potential learning difficulties and the tested sub-sample (83 subjects) could represent the screened-in sample (129 subjects), it was projected that around 26% of the studied sample of NEY subjects (81 subjects[13] out of the total number of 307 NEY subjects sampled) could be regarded as having potential or certain degree of learning difficulties.

NEY subjects with psychological problems

6.26 Among the 307 NEY subjects, 86 (28 %) yielded GHQ score of 8 or above and were invited to attend the SCID sessions. 68 out of the 86 screened-in subjects participated in the SCID sessions.

6.27 Out of the 68 subjects interviewed, 33 (48.5%) met the threshold/sub-threshold levels of the Axis I disorders covered by SCID and hence were identified as having psychological problems. Assuming that subjects with GHQ score below 8 were not having any psychological problem and the tested sub-sample (68 subjects) was a good representation of the characteristics of the screened-in sample (86 subjects) for SCID sessions, it was projected that around 13.7 % of the studied sample of NEY subjects (42[14] out of a total of 307 NEY subjects sampled) were having psychological problems by the time the study was conducted.

6.28 The SCID sessions revealed that there were three possible major types of psychiatric and psychological problems encountered by the NEY subjects, including mood

[13] The number is projected by using the formula 129 (number of screened-in subjects) X 62.7%.
[14] The number is projected by using the formula 86 (number of screened-in subjects) X 48.5%.

disorder, substance use disorder, and anxiety disorder. Regarding mood disorder, major depressive disorder and substance-induced mood disorder were the two major sub-categories of disorder identified among the subjects.

NEY subjects with potential learning difficulties and psychological problems

6.29 Among the 307 NEY subjects, 12 (3.9%) were identified as having potential learning difficulties and psychological problems.

Limitations of the findings

6.30 The Task Force notes that the estimates of the number/percentage of subjects with potential learning difficulties among the NEY sample *(6.25 refers)* in the study should be read and interpreted with caution for the following reasons –

(a) The presence of the high proportion of refusal cases (i.e. a high proportion of the screened-in subjects did not take the follow-up test);

(b) The estimate was based on the assumption that those with LDS scores of below 24 were not having potential learning difficulties;

(c) The tasks in the follow-up test were more related to difficulties in the area of language learning. Arithmetic abilities were not tested by the test battery. Cases with difficulties in mathematics but not in reading and writing could be missed; and

(d) The presence of NEY subjects (1% of total number of NEY subjects sampled) who had not completed primary education but were assumed to have sufficient opportunities to learn basic reading skills[15].

6.31 The Task Force also notes that the findings on NEY subjects with psychological problems (*6.26 - 6.28 refers*) are subject to the following limitations -

(a) Instead of obtaining a full account of the developmental difficulties of the subjects, the SCID sessions mainly focused on collecting information relating to the various Axis I psychiatric disorders;

[15] The assumption was made because the Chinese characters which the subjects were required to read or name in the follow-up test were selected from those taught in the primary school curriculum.

(b) Due to time and resource constraints, the NEY subjects recruited in the study were mainly referred by local outreach teams and participants of the pilot projects supported by the Fund. The research team had not been able to recruit NEYs who did not have any connection with outreach teams, or take part in the pilot projects but required psychological support for the study;

(c) Unlike regular consultations through which clients might want to understand and manage their psychiatric or psychological problems, subjects were invited to uncover their psychological difficulties passively. Subjects' motivation might be further reduced when they realized that the interview session would last for more than half an hour, which led to difficulty in sustaining their interest in disclosing their personal experiences;

(d) The interview sessions depended much on subjects' subjective recall of experiences. Some of them found it difficult to describe the frequency, duration or specific details of certain feelings and behaviours. Their willingness to express might also be affected by their mood at the time of interview; and

(e) Since the information collected during the interview sessions was mainly obtained from the NEY subjects, it might be argued that there was a lack of collateral information from other informants such as their family members.

Application of the screening tool and its limitation

6.32 Despite the fact that S-NEY is a user-friendly tool that serves to facilitate initial screening for identification of NEY and at-risk youth who may have learning difficulties and/or psychological problems, the Task Force notes that as it is still in the developing stage, it is by no means a diagnostic tool for assessment of subjects with specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) and/or psychological problems.

6.33 In particular, the Task force recognizes that further fine-tuning and validations would be required for the newly developed instrument - LDS, which is a crucial part of the S-NEY. The major limitations of the LDS are as follows:

(a) The 50 items included in the LDS do not cover fully the wide spectrum of behaviours that are associated with all the commonly known types of

learning difficulties. Instead, the LDS was designed with focus placed on those behaviours representing difficulties in academic learning.

(b) The cut-off score supported by initial analysis in the study (24) is high in sensitivity but low in specificity, thus resulting in a high false positive rate (52.5%). In other words, the use of this cut-off score makes the LDS less capable in identifying subjects without learning difficulties as non-case. Follow-up tests are required to be administered to the screened-in subjects so as to remove the false positive cases resulting from the cut-off score adopted.

(c) The initial validation of the LDS conducted by the research team was based on a sample of secondary school students who were not formally diagnosed with learning difficulties. Further validation studies employing a formally diagnosed sample would be conducive to establishing more precise psychometric properties of the LDS.

Service gaps in addressing the needs of NEY with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems, their parents and frontline workers

6.34 To facilitate the identification of service gaps, if any, in the existing identification and intervention mechanisms in addressing the needs of NEY, in particular those with learning difficulties and psychological problems, as well as the needs of their parents and frontline workers, the research team organized a total of ten focus group discussion sessions: including five sessions for NEY without marked learning difficulties and psychological problems, one session for NEY who may have certain degree of learning difficulties and/or psychological problems, three sessions for frontline workers dealing with NEY, and one session for parents of NEY.

6.35 With reference to the feedback collected from the focus group discussion sessions, the service gaps as identified by the research team are set out as follows -

(a) **Awareness and understanding of learning difficulties and its impact on learning.** While findings from the current study suggested that the problem of learning difficulties could be more severe among the NEY than the general local population, both the NEY subjects and their parents manifested inadequate awareness and understanding of the problem and its possible impact. Little understanding among teachers and school administrators, as well as lack of school curriculum that meets the multitude of interests of

students with learning difficulties, might also contribute to the their negative schooling experiences.

(b) **Psychological well-being of NEY.** The major types of psychological and psychiatric problems encountered by NEY are mood disorder, substance use disorder, and anxiety disorder. Besides, NEY also appear to be mostly affected and disturbed by issues relating to employment and financial conditions, as well as relationship problems. The psychological well-being of NEY needs to be strengthened so as to enhance their coping ability and hence enable them to play functional roles in the society.

(c) **Professional training for frontline workers**. Many frontline workers indicated that they had encountered difficulties in identifying young people who might have learning difficulties and/or psychological problems. They need more professional training, particularly on areas of learning difficulties and mental health, in order to acquire the knowledge and skills required in facilitating early identification and intervention for young people with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems.

(d) **Availability of resources and support for the family of NEY.** Many parents of NEY indicated that they were suffering from intense parenting stress and found it difficult to communicate with their children. Yet few reported that they had received support from schools and some encountered problems in accessing suitable social resources in helping their children.

6.36 To address the service gaps identified above, the Task Force notes that the research team has made a number of recommendations on how best to assist NEY with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems. Details of the recommendations and the Task Force's views will be discussed in *Chapter 7*.

7. WAY FORWARD

Future Directions

7.1 In drawing up the recommendations on how best to assist NEY in the long run, the Task Force considers it essential to strike a balance between achieving the greatest impact while ensuring the feasibility and sustainability of individual recommendations. In so doing, the Task Force has taken into consideration its previous experience in steering and monitoring the implementation of pilot projects as well as the recommendations of the two research studies on NEY and the policy and resource implications related thereto. A summary of the recommendations of the two research studies is at Annex D.

7.2 The Task Force considers that future policy direction and measures for addressing issues relating to NEY should be formulated along the general premises as set out below -

(a) **Adopting an integrated and holistic approach in both policy formulation and delivery of support services**. The Task Force believes that the adoption of an integrated and holistic approach will facilitate the formulation of NEY-related policy in a comprehensive manner, with due regard to relevant considerations spanning different policy areas, and avoid the delivery of services in a fragmented manner.

(b) **Striving for consolidation and enhancement of existing services**. The Task Force recognizes that a lot of resources have already been devoted to the provision of support services for youth, including NEY. To ensure more efficient use of resources, efforts should be made to capitalise on and consolidate the existing service platform and introduce enhancement measures as appropriate; and

(c) **Making the best use of the established mechanisms and networks**. The Task Force notes that a considerable number of established mechanisms and networks are in place in the delivery of support services for youth, including NEY. Instead of inventing new wheels which may result in unnecessary duplication and fragmentation, the Task Force believes that, with greater collaboration and better co-ordination among relevant stakeholders, it would be more appropriate and effective to take forward NEY-related policy and

measures under the established and existing mechanisms and networks.

Specific Recommendations of the Task Force

Making Use of a Suitable Established Mechanism for Policy Formulation and Central Coordination

7.3 The Task Force recognizes that the problem of NEY is multi-faceted, involving considerations not only from youth policy, but also other perspectives including school involvement and family support/participation (*please also see 7.5 – 7.10 below*). Hence, the Task Force recommends that a comprehensive and holistic approach should be adopted to tackle the NEY-related issues at the macro and policy level. Such an approach would also more effectively avoid unnecessary labeling effect and better ensure efficient utilization of resources.

7.4 Instead of setting up a new committee to specifically oversee and co-ordinate the work related to NEY, the Task Force considers that it would be more appropriate and effective to take forward NEY-related policy and measures under a suitable established mechanism which comprises relevant government bureaux/departments and other stakeholders. The proposed arrangement would help achieve better synergy and avoid unnecessary duplication and fragmentation of services.

Strengthening the Role of Schools and Family as an Effective Preventive Measure

7.5 The Task Force recognizes early identification, prevention and intervention as the most effective, sustainable and cost-effective strategy in tackling the NEY problem and considers that <u>schools</u> and <u>family</u> are the two social institutions through which related preventive measures could be best administered. In this regard, the Task Force notes that while education on parenting is helpful, it is difficult to administer direct intervention in family business. The school system is thus a better venue for introducing preventive measures effectively.

<u>Support in School</u>

7.6 The Task Force notes that career guidance services are currently available in secondary schools to help students understand their interests and abilities, draw up educational or career plans at an early stage, and develop an appropriate attitude towards work. Schools are also encouraged to adopt a whole school approach to

guidance and discipline and organize a comprehensive range of preventive, developmental and remedial programmes/activities to enhance students' sense of belongings and resilience. Besides, elements of career education, emotional education, moral education and health education are covered in the current primary and secondary curriculum with a view to promoting the development of generic skills, positive values and attitudes among young people. The Task Force is also pleased to note that the ongoing youth learning programme "P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme"[16] designed for junior secondary school students has yielded positive feedback, and that EDB has formed a working group under the Curriculum Development Council to review the provision of moral civil education and would consider integrating the P.A.T.H.S. programme into the school curriculum.

7.7 The Task Force appreciates the importance of early identification of and assistance for students with learning difficulties. In this regard, the Task Force is aware that EDB has stepped up efforts in planning and implementing various improvement measures to enhance the screening, assessment and support services provided for them in primary and secondary schools in recent years. Such measures focus on arousing teachers' and parents' awareness of the importance of early identification of students with learning difficulties and adopting appropriate teaching and management skills for these students, encouraging schools to adopt a whole school approach to foster an inclusive school climate, and helping schools to implement curriculum adaptation and provide special examination arrangements to maximize the chance of success for students with learning difficulties. Examples of these improvement measures include:

(a) Publishing a new edition of the "Observation Checklists for Teachers" for the purpose of identification of Primary One students with learning difficulties and a variety of teaching resources,

(b) Developing and distributing the "Hong Kong Specific Learning Difficulties Behaviour Checklist for Primary School Students" for use by primary school

[16] To promote the holistic development of adolescents in Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HKJCCT) has approved $400 million to implement, in collaboration with EDB and SWD, a four-year programme known as "P.A.T.H.S. to Adulthood: A Jockey Club Enhancement Scheme" from 2005/06 to 2008/09 school year. The term "P.A.T.H.S." denotes Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes. The Scheme is being implemented in Secondary One to Secondary Three and schools' participation is voluntary. The research team of the Scheme suggested that the Scheme was effective in helping junior secondary students in various aspects such as personal growth, psychological well-being, emotion control and interpersonal relationship, and recommended that the Scheme should become part and parcel of the school curriculum upon cessation of funding support from HKJCCT.

teachers for early identification of specific learning difficulties in reading and writing;

(c) Developing and distributing the norm-referenced "Hong Kong Chinese Reading and Writing Abilities Assessment for Secondary School Students (for use by teachers)", which can be used by Chinese Language teachers in secondary schools for the initial screening of secondary school students suspected to have specific learning difficulties in reading and writing and providing them with early support;

(d) Planning and developing a screening checklist for identifying secondary school students with specific learning difficulties in reading and writing for use by secondary school teachers. The checklist is expected to be completed in August 2009;

(e) Publishing the revised edition of the Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing (with extended norms for Primary five and six students) and the Hong Kong Test of Specific Learning Difficulties in Reading and Writing for Junior Secondary School Students, both of which are diagnostic assessment tools, for use by educational psychologists, so as to facilitate the assessment of specific learning difficulties for primary and junior secondary school students respectively;

(f) Supporting and facilitating the implementation of the five-year "Read & Write Project" funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club and commenced in September 2006 which aims at enhancing schools' capability to identify and support students with specific learning difficulties, developing assessment tools, a school-based support model and a district-based support network, as well as strengthening professional development for teachers;

(g) Issuing various guidelines for schools on providing special examination arrangements for students with special education needs, including those with specific learning difficulties; and

(h) Putting in place a training framework for teachers with a view to improving their capacity in supporting students with learning difficulties in the five years starting from the 2007/08 school year, supplemented with thematic courses on specific learning difficulties for English and Chinese Language teachers.

7.8 The Task Force recommends that the EDB should keep in view the need for changes and improvements in the education system and school curriculum to address the needs of children and youth and foster holistic personal development. Regular and continuous support for schools and teachers should be provided to better ensure effective delivery of assistance to students, in particular those with learning difficulties and psychological problems. The EDB should also continue to review and strengthen the screening, assessment and support services for students with learning difficulties.

Parental Education and Support

7.9 As regards parental education and support, the Task Force notes that, over the years, the Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC) under the EDB has been actively promoting parental education and positive parental involvement in the education process through a wide range of publicity programmes, seminars and workshops. To facilitate early detection of learning difficulties, the EDB has published leaflets and organized seminars to enhance parents' awareness of learning difficulties and knowledge about the assessment and support services available. The Task Force also notes that the Family Life Education Units, the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), the Integrated Services Centres and the Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) being operated/subvented by SWD also provide family life education, counseling and support services for parents, including those of NEY, as an integral part of their service programmes.

7.10 The Task Force recommends that the EDB, SWD and NGOs providing family and youth services should continue to strengthen the support services for parents, with more emphasis on enhancing education for parents on communication skills and career planning for youth, as well as enhancing their understanding of learning difficulties and psychological problems and awareness of the related services available for them.

Capitalizing on Existing Support Services for Youth through Better Coordination

7.11 The Task Force notes that government departments, training institutions and NGOs have been devoting a lot of resources and efforts in providing a comprehensive range of support services, pre-employment and on-the-job training as well as vocational training opportunities for youth, including NEY and those with special

needs. These include -

Service centres/units operated in one-stop mode

(a) Youth Employment Resource Centre (YERC) under the LD: providing one-stop employment advisory and support services for youth aged 15 to 29;

(b) ICYSCs subvented by the SWD and operated by NGOs: providing youth and outreaching services for children and youth aged 6-24, including NEY;

(c) District Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams subvented by the SWD and operated by NGOs: providing outreach services for high-risk youth;

Vocational training programmes

(a) The Vocational Development Programme for NEY and other vocational training programmes offered by the VTC;

(b) Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP) and Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS) provided by the LD; and

(c) Training programmes and services provided by the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) (following the relaxation of eligibility criteria of the Employees Retraining Scheme (ERS) to cover young people aged between 15 and 29 and those with education level of sub-degree or below with effect from 1 December 2007).

7.12 The Task Force is also pleased to note that apart from the various vocational training programmes currently available for youth, the ERB is planning to organise more dedicated training courses to meet the needs and interests of youth aged between 15 and 29 following the relaxation of the eligibility criteria of the ERS. The Task Force considers that the expansion of the ERS will effectively provide more skill-based training opportunities for young school leavers, including NEY. A safety net can then be provided to those who are either financially incapable, or disinclined to continue studies at school settings. The post-placement support services which are added on top of regular placement support can also help these youth to adjust to the changes and demands in the workplace.

7.13 In particular, the Task Force notes with appreciation the ERB's latest proposal[17] to implement, on a pilot basis, a Youth Training Programme (YTP) for those aged between 15 and 20 seeking to provide them with training on vocational and foundation skills with special emphasis placed on training of personal attributes, nurturing of positive attitudes towards life, confidence, discipline, and pursuit of excellence. The Task Force understands that the ERB will partner with training institutions which have ample experience in youth training and possess extensive employer networks in the design and piloting of the YTP. It is also hoped that through the provision of these new courses, these young people would be able to find jobs that suit their career aspirations or articulate to further studies/training programmes and chart learning pathway for continuous improvement.

7.14 The Task Force also notes the ERB's plans to offer a specialized youth version of "Community Harmony Course" (CHC)[18] and to provide more places in part-time foundation skills (including languages, numeracy, applied IT skills) training at communities with great number of youth experiencing problem of isolation. In particular, the pilot part-time CHC will be enriched with elements of personal grooming, communication skills, life and career planning, and field trips and visits to other districts to meet the special training needs of young new arrivals. The Task Force believes that all these new initiatives would provide more options for self improvement to youth who are feeling inadequate, including NEY, in the knowledge-based economy.

7.15 Mindful of the general directions in taking forward the NEY-related policy and measures as identified (*please see 7.2 above*) and having regard to the vast array of services and training programmes currently available for youth, including NEY, the Task Force considers that the establishment of separate and dedicated service centres for NEY will likely result in duplication with some of the programmes and services being provided/planned to be provided for young people and possible labeling effect on NEY which are highly undesirable. As such, instead of setting up dedicated services centres for NEY, the Task Force sees the need for encouraging better coordination and closer collaboration among the relevant stakeholders (including

[17] The ERB has recently completed a strategic review on its future roles and operations and released a consultation document on its future directions on 24 January 2008. The consultation document has set out comprehensive proposals on how the ERB would expand the scope and enhance the quality of its training and retraining services.

[18] "Community Harmony Course" (CHC) is a pilot course to be provided by the ERB in Tin Shui Wai targeting young new arrivals. The course will be an enhanced version of the "Job Search Skills Course" currently designed for new arrivals. The training content of the CHC will include sourcing of community resources, learning local transport networks, learning to read the traditional Chinese characters, appropriate ways to handle family problems, etc.

government departments, NGOs and training institutions, etc.) to facilitate timely referral services that connect NEY with the appropriate support services and training programmes that meet their needs.

7.16 In this connection, the Task Force also notes from the Household Survey conducted by the research team that about 85% of the non-engaged respondents had not sought assistance from the employment services or participated in the training programmes funded by the Government. While the survey has not provided an in-depth analysis of the reasons for low utilization and participation rates among the NEY, the Task Force considers that the survey results may point us to the need to step up efforts in promoting the existing employment support services and vocational training programmes already available for youth, including NEY, among relevant stakeholders and youth in need.

Exploring Special Assistance for NEY with Low Motivation and Weak Social Network

7.17 Despite the availability of the multifarious services and training programmes for youth, the Task Force is mindful that some NEY who have very low motivation and weak social support network may be unwilling to seek assistance or services. The Task Force is pleased to note that the service targets of the Family Support Programme (FSP) launched by the SWD since early 2007 also include NEY, in particular the hidden youth. The FSP is an enhanced service launched by the SWD to serve a more difficult-to-reach group of vulnerable and socially isolated individuals and families through provision of intensive support and proactive outreaching services, with a view to motivating them to receive appropriate services at an early stage so as to prevent further deterioration of their problems. The Task Force also recommends that the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk (CSYR) under the SWD should take into account the characteristics and specific needs of NEY, echo the related policy and measures, and promote cross-sector collaboration and coordination in achieving effective service delivery.

Strengthening Professional Training

7.18 The Task Force recognizes the importance of professional training for youth workers in various fronts/platforms as they play an important role in identifying the needs of young people and providing them with the necessary assistance, guidance and support.

7.19 The Task Force is of the view that while professional training courses are being organized by the SWD and individual NGOs, consideration may be given to further enhancing the professional training and support for youth workers, particularly on areas such as career planning and guidance for youth, and support services for youth with learning difficulties and psychological problems. In this regard, the Task Force recommends that the Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning under the SWD should look into and follow up on the related issues.

7.20 The Task Force also recommends that tertiary institutions should be encouraged to review and enrich their study programmes on social work and services from time to time, taking into account the up-to-date training needs of frontline youth workers.

Tapping Community and Corporate Resources in support of Innovative Services

7.21 The Task Force is pleased to know that the pilot projects supported by the Fund were in general able to address some of the training needs of NEY including those of hidden youth and ethnic minority youth. The Task Force also notes that some of these projects have successfully secured funding support from various sources, e.g. The Community Chest, for continued provision of the services following the expiry of support from the Fund.

7.22 The Task Force notes that while the Government is willing to provide seed money through various established funding schemes, as appropriate, to support the initiation of worthy projects for NEY and to distill from them the successful formula, training providers and NGOs should be encouraged to build closer partnerships and collaborate with the private sector and other non-governmental funding bodies with a view to soliciting more community support and participation in sustaining their services for NEY.

Exploring the Feasibility of Setting up a Centralised database on NEY

7.23 The Task Force appreciates the value of setting up a centralized database to facilitate the tracking of NEY and youth-at-risk and their development. However, the Task Force is also gravely concerned about the sensitivity and complications involved in developing such a database, including privacy problem, labeling effect, co-operation and data sharing arrangements among the relevant departments and NGOs, etc. All these complications and problems would have to be fully addressed and resolved

before the idea could be taken forward.

7.24 In view of the above, the Task Force considers that it is pre-mature at the current stage to pursue the idea, and recommends that further and more detailed study of the matter be conducted in future, if considered necessary and appropriate.

Development of a Screening Tool for Identification of NEY with Learning Difficulties in the Long Run

7.25 The Task Force notes the efforts made by the EDB in recent years to enhance the screening services for primary school students and assessment services for both primary and junior secondary school students with a view to facilitating early identification of learning difficulties among children and youth (*7.7 refers*). The Task Force is also pleased to note that in addition to the existing screening tools for primary school students, the EDB is developing a screening checklist for use by secondary school teachers so as to facilitate identification of secondary school students with specific learning difficulties. While consideration may be given to exploring and studying the applicability of the screening tool being developed by the EDB for screening of young NEY, the Task Force is of the view that there are merits in developing and introducing a valid and reliable screening tool for school dropouts and NEY who may not have received such screening and/or assessment services in school for various reasons.

7.26 As the first step towards achieving the goal of developing such a tool, the Task Force notes the efforts made by the researchers in developing an initial and experimental screening tool in one of the research studies. The Task Force, however, acknowledges the limitations of the experimental screening tool developed so far and the need for the tool to undergo further and vigorous fine-tuning and validations before it could be adopted for use. In this regard, the Task Force agrees that while consideration may be given to sharing the initial screening tool with relevant stakeholders (including the EDB which is in the course of developing a screening tool for secondary school students) for reference and comments upon request, the tool should only be taken as an experimental tool and must be used with caution.

Looking Ahead

7.27 The Task Force is pleased to note the declining trend in the number of NEY in Hong

Kong over the years. And yet, the Task Force also acknowledges the huge social costs that the NEY problem may bring and the importance of mounting effective preventive measures as well as providing appropriate and timely support and assistance for NEY. With the joint efforts of all sectors of the community, the Task Force believes that we would not only be able to address the NEY problem effectively, but also help promote the positive and all-rounded development of youth in Hong Kong.

Annex A (i)

Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth

Membership

(1 March 2004 - 28 February 2006)

Chairmen

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower

Members

Representatives from Social Services Sector
Mr Gary TANG Leung-shun
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Ms Winnie YING Fung-sau

Representative from Business Sector
Ms Louise CHAN Chin-ha
Mr CHAN Yun-kan
Mr Joseph LEE Chung-tak, BBS, JP
Mr David PONG Teng

Representatives from Training Sector
Dr Edmond LO Kin-ki
Mr Patrick PANG Bing-hung

Representative from Sports Sector
Ms Fay HO Kim-fai

Representatives from Education Sector
Mrs Amy CHAN CHOW Pik-yiu, MH
Prof. Joseph LAU Tak-fai
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP

Youth Representatives

Mr CHAN Wai-lam

Mr Max WONG Mau-chung

Government Representatives

Representative from Home Affairs Bureau

Representative from Home Affairs Department

Representative from Labour Department

Representative from Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Representative from Social Welfare Department

Secretary

Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau

Annex A (ii)

Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth

Membership

(1 March 2006 - 29 February 2008)

Chairmen

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare[1]

Members

Representatives from Social Services Sector
Rev Peter John NEWBERY, MH
Mr Gary TANG Leung-shun
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Ms Winnie YING Fung-sau

Representative from Business Sector
Mr Rock CHEN Chung-nin
Mr David PONG Teng[2]

Representatives from Training Sector
Dr Edmond LO Kin-ki
Mr Patrick PANG Bing-hung

Representative from Sports Sector
Ms Fay HO Kim-fai

Representatives from Education Sector
Prof. LO Tit-wing
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP

Youth Representatives
Mr CHAN Wai-lam

Mr Max WONG Mau-chung

Other Individuals

Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP

Dr CHOW Chun-bong, BBS

Government Representatives

Representative from Education Bureau[3]

Representative from Home Affairs Bureau

Representative from Home Affairs Department

Representative from Labour Department

Representative from Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Representative from Social Welfare Department

Secretary

Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower), Labour and Welfare Bureau[4]

Remarks:

1 Permanent Secretary for Education and Manpower before the re-oragnization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007

2 Mr David PONG resigned from the membership of the Task Force on 4 May 2007.

3 With effect from 1 July 2007

4 Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau before the re-organization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007

Annex B (i)

Sub-committees of the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment Related Training for Youth

Membership

(1 March 2004 - 28 February 2006)

Sub-committee on Vetting and Assessment of Pilot Projects

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Mr CHAN Wai-lam
Mrs Amy CHAN CHOW Pik-yiu, MH
Ms Fay HO Kim-fai
Mr Joseph LEE Chung-tak, BBS, JP
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau (Secretary)

Sub-committee on Train-the-trainer Programmes and Activities for Youth Workers

Mr Gary TANG Leung-shun (Chairman)
Dr Edmond LO Kin-ki
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau (Secretary)

Sub-committee on Research Studies on Non-engaged Youth

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Prof. Joseph LAU Tak-fai
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP
Mr Gary TANG Leung-shun
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Ms Winnie YING Fung-sau

Representative from Home Affairs Bureau

Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau (Secretary)

Annex B (ii)

Sub-committees of the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment Related Training for Youth

Membership

(1 March 2006 - 29 February 2008)

Sub-committee on Vetting and Assessment of Pilot Projects[1]

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Mr CHAN Wai-lam
Ms Fay HO Kim-fai
Rev Peter John NEWBERY, MH
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau (Secretary)

Sub-committee on Train-the-trainer Programmes and Activities for Youth Workers

Mr Gary TANG Leung-shun (Chairman)
Dr Edmond LO Kin-ki
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower), Labour and Welfare Bureau[2] (Secretary)

Sub-committee on Research Studies on Non-engaged Youth

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP
Mr Gary TANG Leung-shun
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Ms Winnie YING Fung-sau
Representative from Home Affairs Bureau
Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower), Labour and Welfare Bureau[2] (Secretary)

Steering Committee on Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of Non-engaged Youth

Task Force members

Dr Philemon CHOI Yuen-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Dr CHOW Chun-bong, BBS
Prof. LO Tit-wing
Prof. TAM Man-kwan, BBS, JP
Ms Jane TSUEI Pik-shan
Ms Winnie YING Fung-sau
Representative from Home Affairs Bureau
Representative from Education Bureau[3]
Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower), Labour and Welfare Bureau[2] (Secretary)

Experts from Medical and Psychological Services Sectors

Dr Aaron YU Chak Man, Consultant Paediatrician
Mrs Louisa LEE CHAN Kwan Yee, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Social Welfare Department

Remarks:

1 Application for the Youth Sustainable Development and Engagement Fund was closed in April 2006. The Sub-committee on Vetting and Assessment of Pilot Projects was dissolved after the relevant vetting and assessment work had been completed.
2 Principal Assistant Secretary (Manpower Planning and Training), Education and Manpower Bureau before the re-organization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007
3 Ms LEE Suk-han, Senior Specialist in Educational Psychology Service of the Education Bureau has been a member of the Steering Committee since its establishment. Ms LEE has also become a member of the Task Force after the re-organization of the Government Secretariat on 1 July 2007.

Annex C

Pilot Projects Approved by the Task Force

(A) Programmes that aim at motivating NEY to seek self-improvement and work (Number of projects: 8)

	Name of project	Organizer
1.	Let's Walk （"有網能量"青年導航及發展中心）	Hong Kong Christian Service
2.	Create your Dream （想創里-青少年成長及試業空間）	The Boys' Brigade, Hong Kong
3.	New Taster Programme （Teen 才再現計劃）	Vocational Training Council
4.	Chinese Cuisine Basic Training （自我提升及中式廚藝基礎培訓）	The Caritas-Hong Kong
5.	New Taster Programme – Further Education （Teen 才再現進修篇）	Vocational Training Council
6.	I-hearts （心燃計劃）	Hong Kong Christian Service
7.	Let's Walk II （"有網能量"青年導航及發展中心—進階試驗篇）	Hong Kong Christian Service
8.	Development Through Acting[#] （演活自己全方位素質培訓課程）	Mandarin Youth Culture Development Limited Company

[#] The organizer has withdrawn its application upon obtaining approval from the Fund.

(B) Modern apprenticeship schemes (Number of projects: 5)

	Name of project	Organizer
1.	Operation New Youth （新青年工程）	The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong
2.	Modern Apprenticeship （現代學徒計劃）	Vocational Training Council
3.	Rainbow Programme* （彩虹階梯人力網絡）	The Caritas-Hong Kong

4.	Training for South Asian Youth* （信有南天—南亞裔青少年就業培訓計劃）	Hong Kong Christian Service
5.	New Taster Programme – Employment （Teen 才再現就業篇）	Vocational Training Council

* The projects also aim at motivating NEYs to seek self-improvement and work.

(C) Training for sports-related careers (Number of projects: 3)

	Name of project	Organizer
1.	Rowing Training （青少年及社區體育助理試驗計劃—賽艇）	Hong Kong China Rowing Association
2.	Sports Assistant Training （體育專科教練網絡）	Hong Kong Playground Association
3.	SKY BIKE* （SKY BIKE 踏上天梯）	The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong

* The project also aims at motivating NEYs to seek self-improvement and work.

(D) Training for creative and cultural industries (Number of projects: 4)

	Name of project	Organizer
1.	Hip Hop School* （跳出舞 Teen 地）	Youth Outreach
2.	Cartoon Production# （卡通製作班）	Daydreamer Cartoon Academy Limited
3.	MY Concept （MY concept “吾式作業”演藝培訓計劃）	The Church of United Brethren in Christ, Hong Kong Limited
4.	Wedding Decoration and Floral Art Training （婚禮花飾設計及婚宴佈置製作訓練計劃）	The Caritas-Hong Kong

*The project also aims at motivating NEYs to seek self-improvement and work.
The project has not commenced because of insufficient enrolment.

(E) Training and employment programmes in the Mainland (Number of projects: 4)

	Name of project	Organizer
1.	Employment Training in the Mainland（青年內地見習計劃）	Vocational Training Council
2.	Software Development（電腦程式設計及內地軟件開發工作訓練）	The Caritas-Hong Kong
3.	Employment Training in the Mainland II+（青年內地學徒培訓計劃）	Vocational Training Council
4.	Employment Training in the Mainland and Hong Kong~（中港創 Teen 地）	Youth Outreach

+ The project is also a Modern Apprenticeship Scheme.

~ The project also provides training related to creative and cultural industries and aims at motivating NEYs to seek self-improvement and work

Annex D

Recommendations of the Research Studies on NEY commissioned by the Task Force

To better understand the NEY-related issues in Hong Kong, the Task Force commissioned independent researchers to conduct two studies – one to assess the effectiveness of the pilot projects as well as other existing training and employment programmes for NEY; and another to examine specifically the needs of NEYs with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems. The recommendations in the two research studies are summarized in the following paragraphs.

A. "Research on Training and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong"

(a) To set up a Central Steering Committee on NEY

- The research team recommended that a "Central Steering Committee on NEY" be set up under the relevant bureau/department or the Commission on Youth to formulate NEY policies and oversee related services.

(b) To strengthen the preventive measures for NEY

- The research team stressed the importance of preventive measures in addressing the NEY problem, and recommended that schools and family should play a major role in providing early assistance and services for children and youth, particularly before they reach Secondary 3 level of education (or before the age of 15). Recommended measures include –

  (i) To identify, at an early stage, children and youth with difficulties in learning and social interaction and provide them with appropriate assistance and guidance.

  (ii) To provide diverse learning opportunities and alternative learning paths for youth with varied interests, abilities and inclinations through the development and implementation of Applied Learning Courses.

  (iii) To enhance the career planning and counseling services in secondary schools, in particular those with a larger intake of Band 3 students; and

to provide relevant professional training for teachers and school social workers.

(iv) To strengthen parental education through the Family Life Education Units being operated/subvented by the SWD[2] and to provide necessary guidance and support for parents in dealing with the schooling and employment issues of their children.

(v) To provide and disseminate updated information on education, training and career opportunities for youth through a reliable and easily accessible platform e.g. the Youth Portal recently launched by the Efficiency Unit of the Government.

(vi) To consider providing funding support for youth learning programmes that were proved to be effective in promoting all-round and positive development of youth.

(c) <u>To enhance the guidance and support services for NEY</u>

- The research team recommended that targeted services catering for the needs of different groups of NEY should be provided, either through enhancement of existing services or development of new services as follows –

<u>Enhancement of existing programmes and services</u>

(i) To continue to provide and enhance the territory-wide and successful education and training programmes including "Project Yi-jin", "Youth Pre-employment Training Programme" and "Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme" so as to provide a safety net for NEY.

(ii) The 134[2] Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres being subvented by the SWD and operated by NGOs should include in their service targets NEY with higher motivations to study or work.

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[2] In fact, apart from the Family Life Education Units, the Integrated Family Services Centres, the Integrated Services Centres and the Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres being operated/subvented by the SWD also provide family life education, counseling and support services for parents. The above only summarizes the researchers' recommendations in the "Research on Trainng and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong".

[2] The latest number of the Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres as at April 2008 should be 135. The above only summarizes the researchers' recommendations in the "Research on Trainng and Employment Programmes for Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong".

(iii) The 16 District Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams staffed by professional social workers should provide counseling services for relatively high-risk yet not entirely unmotivated NEY.

Development of new services

(iv) To set up One-stop Integrated Services Centres for NEY at district level to deliver a full range of services including information provision, employment-related training, career guidance and counseling, assessment of needs, referral and follow-up services. One or two centres are proposed to be set up on a pilot basis in selected districts with a larger population of NEY.

(v) To set up a centralized database on NEY to facilitate information sharing, service provision and evaluation, as well as policy formulation. The database could also be used to keep track of the development of individual NEY.

(vi) To provide funding support for youth services agencies to organize professional training, on a continuing basis, for frontline youth workers in the provision of career planning and counseling services for NEY.

(vii) To set up a special funding scheme to provide financial support for experienced NGOs to run dedicated services for hidden youth and ethnic minority NEY.

B. "Research on Learning and Psychological Difficulties of Non-engaged Youth in Hong Kong"

(d) To strengthen the provision of support services in schools

- As one of the preventive measures for NEY, the research team recommended strengthening the provision and implementation of support services in schools in order to facilitate early identification of children/youth with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems and thus timely provision of appropriate assistance. Recommended measures include –

(i) To provide a comprehensive range of services in schools, including screening and assessment, special education and training, career planning and counseling, as well as necessary accommodation

arrangements for children and youth with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems.

(ii) To incorporate career education, emotional education, health education on drug and alcohol abuse and dependence into the curriculum for primary schools and junior secondary schools; and to explore the possibility of launching alternative study programmes to help uncover and develop the vocational strengths of students with learning difficulties.

(iii) To provide pre-service and in-service training, as well as long-term follow-up support for teachers, educational psychologists and school administrators in the implementation of school-based support programmes or services for students with learning difficulties and/or psychological problems.

(e) To make use of the screening tool developed in the study to identify senior secondary students, school dropouts and NEY who may have learning difficulties

- In view that screening and assessment services of specific learning difficulties are currently available within the school system for primary and junior secondary school students, the research team proposed making use of the screening tool developed in the study to conduct preliminary screening of learning difficulties for senior secondary school students as well as school dropouts and NEY.

(f) To establish a tracking mechanism for NEY

- A mechanism to track the development of NEY and youth-at-risk is proposed to be set up in order to facilitate matching and delivery of services for them. The research team recommended that such mechanism could be in the form of a centralized database, containing information of individual youth including his/her learning history, assessment and evaluation results, career inclination, as well as services and training received.

(g) To foster parents' involvement and provide them with necessary support

- The research team considered parents' awareness and involvement critical to the early detection of learning difficulties and psychological problems among children and youth. It recommended that home-school collaboration could be

further strengthened with a view to educating parents and getting them involved in their children's learning. More training on communication skills and support services including emotional consultation could be provided to improve their parenting skills, while emphasis should be placed on enhancing preventive care and early intervention among the non-engaged and at-risk youth.

(h) <u>To provide professional training for frontline youth workers</u>

- More professional training was proposed to be provided for youth workers in various fronts to equip them with knowledge about learning difficulties and psychological problems, practical techniques in administering relevant screening tools, as well as necessary skills in the provision of guidance and support services.

(i) <u>To promote mental health education</u>

- The research team recommended strengthening community and family education so as to promote public awareness (including that of young people and their parents) of the importance of mental health, and enhance their understanding of the nature and possible impact of learning difficulties and psychological problems on youth. It also proposed that more emphasis should be placed on psycho-education and development of problem-solving and coping skills in youth learning and training programmes.

(j) <u>To adopt a multi-disciplinary service model in providing support and assistance for NEY</u>

- The research team recommended that cross-sector collaboration be fostered and a multi-disciplinary service model be adopted to better address the needs of NEY and provide them with integrated and comprehensive services. Collaboration between youth service providers and research institutions is also proposed in order to facilitate reviews and researches on the new service model on a continuing basis.

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